"THE MOTHER OF MY LORD"

GIRARDEY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/motherofmylordor0000revf

THE MOTHER OF MY LORD

OR

An Explanation of the Hail Mary

BY

REV. FERREOL GIRARDEY, C.Ss.R.

SECOND EDITION

B. HERDER BOOK CO.

17 South Broadway, St. Louis, Mo.

AND

68 Great Russell St., London, W. C.

1921

St. Louis, Mo.,
Feast of All Saints, 1915

Licet imprimere librum "The Mother of My Lord."

Thos. P. Brown, C. Ss. R.
Sup. Prov.

NIHIL OBSTAT

Sti. Ludovici, die 6. Dec. 1915

F. G. Holweck,
Censor Librorum

IMPRIMATUR

Sti. Ludovici, die 7. Dec. 1915

✠ *Joannes J. Glennon,*
Archiepiscopus
Sti. Ludovici

Copyright, 1916,
by
Joseph Gummersbach

All rights reserved

Printed in U. S. A.

232.931
G519

PREFACE

The object of this little book is to promote devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, by giving special prominence to her Divine Maternity and to the fact that it was God Himself who gave us the example to honor her, and thence to the conclusion that all the honor, love and confidence we bestow upon her is entirely in accordance with the will and example of God Himself and is, moreover, the fulfilment of her own prophecy that "henceforth *all generations* shall call me *blessed*" (Luke 1. 48). All this is found in the explanation of the *Hail Mary,* the best and most beautiful of prayers after the Lord's Prayer. To enhance and corroborate his explanations, the author has added a few "Selections" from Bossuet's Sermons on the Blessed Virgin, Bronchain's Meditations, and the Church Histories of Darras and Rohrbacher. The clients of the Blessed Virgin Mary will find the book well adapted for spiritual reading during the month of May and on her principal Feasts.

37360

CONTENTS

PAGE

Origin of the Hail Mary 1

Hail, Full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee 3

CHAPTER

I The Annunciation 3

II The Visitation 19

"Blessed Art Thou Among Women" . . 22

The Magnificat 25

"Blessed is the Fruit of Thy Womb, Jesus" . 30

The Name of Jesus (Sketch) 34

The Name of Jesus (Sketch) 37

Holy Mary 39

The Name of Mary 45

Holy Mary, Mother of God 48

Pray for Us Sinners 55

The Marriage at Cana 60

Pray for Us Sinners 64

Now 66

And at the Hour of Our Death 66

Mary, the Help of the Dying 71

Amen 75

The Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 76

Mary, Ever a Virgin, Had No Children Besides Jesus 86

Who was the First to Honor the Blessed Virgin Mary? 94

CONTENTS

SELECTIONS FROM BOSSUET'S SERMONS ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

CHAPTER — PAGE

I THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 104
II THE ANNUNCIATION 106
III THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 108
IV WHY GOD CHOSE MARY TO BE THE MOTHER OF THE SAVIOUR 110
V MARY AND EVE 112
VI THE VISITATION 113
VII MARY'S DEATH AND ASSUMPTION INTO HEAVEN . 114

SELECTIONS FROM BRONCHAIN'S MEDITATIONS.

I THE ANGELIC SALUTATION 119
II MARY'S ANSWER TO THE ANGEL GABRIEL . . . 123
III THE DIVINE MATERNITY 126
IV THE NAME OF MARY 130
V THE VISITATION 132
VI MARY'S SHARE IN THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS ON CALVARY 134
VII DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY . . . 136

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY PRAISED BY A WOMAN IN THE CROWD 140

GENERAL CONCLUSION 146

THE DAILY PRAYER OF ST. ALPHONSUS TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY 150

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE "BLESSED FRUIT OF THE WOMB OF MARY" 152

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF THE VIRGIN MARY 179

PRAYER TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST 194

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, "THE MOTHER OF MY LORD" 195

"THE MOTHER OF MY LORD"

ORIGIN OF THE HAIL MARY

Next to the Our Father, which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us, the Hail Mary is the best, the most beautiful and efficacious of prayers. It has also a divine origin, for each of its three parts has been taught by God Himself. The first part, "Hail (Mary), full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women," was the greeting which the angel Gabriel, God's special messenger to the virgin Mary, addressed to her (Luke 1. 27, 28). The second part, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb (Jesus)" (v. 41, 42), was the reply St. Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost," made to Mary's greeting. And the Catholic Church, "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3. 15), founded by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Ghost, "the Spirit of truth" (John 15. 26), has added the third part, "Holy

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Therefore, when we recite the Hail Mary, we salute, venerate and exalt Mary as "the Mother of God" (Luke 1. 43) with the very words which God Himself addressed to her through the angel Gabriel, His faithful ambassador, for the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation of His divine Son; we congratulate Mary in the words the Holy Ghost inspired St. Elizabeth to utter, for being exalted above all creatures as the Mother of Him who "is called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1. 32). Then with the infallible Church of the Son of God, we invoke and beseech Mary, His divinely chosen Mother, to help us, to "pray for us," weak and frail and sinful mortals, both in life and at the hour of our death, that we, too, may be admitted to see, praise and love her divine Son and her forever in heaven.

HAIL, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD IS WITH THEE; BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.

I. THE ANNUNCIATION

(Luke 1. 26-38)

"At that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."

"At that time," that is, six months after the same angel Gabriel had appeared in the temple of Jerusalem to the priest Zachary, to announce to him that, in his old age, a son would be born to him, whom he should call John, and who was to be the precursor in Israel of the promised Saviour. The time when God sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary is designated by St. Paul as "the fulness of time," that is, when "the seventy weeks of years" which were to precede the death of the promised Redeemer for the salvation of mankind, would in no very distant fu-

ture be completed (Dan. 9. 24). When God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, Herod, the Idumean, who had wrested and usurped the scepter of Juda from the house of David, was nearing the end of his despotic and cruel reign, and the second temple of Jerusalem, which the prophet Aggeus had foretold (2. 8) "the Desired of all nations would fill with glory," in which were preserved the Jewish genealogies, was still standing in all its splendor.

It was "at that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth." Gabriel, whose name signifies "strength of God," is sent to announce a great mystery, to make a wonderful revelation, which concerned the eternal welfare of the whole human race. He was sent by God Himself to Nazareth, a poor, obscure town, which had previously never produced anything worthy of record.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God Himself "to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary." Although of royal lineage, Mary was but an obscure virgin inhabiting a poor dwelling with her newly espoused husband, Joseph, "a just man" (Mat. 1. 19), but poor in this world's goods. The prophet Isaias had, centuries before, clearly foretold that "a virgin shall

conceive and bring forth" the expected Redeemer, "God with us" (Is. 7. 14). Another prophecy stated that the Messias was to be of the house, or family, of David. The words of Isaias clearly and unmistakably indicate the Redeemer's miraculous conception and birth and also His divinity, for he says: "A *virgin* shall *conceive* and *bear a Son,* and His name shall be called *Emmanuel,*" which name means "God with us" and indicates plainly the divinity of the "Son" whom the "*virgin*" was to "*conceive* and *bear.*" Mary of Nazareth was the "virgin" chosen by God for this wonderful mystery. Her marriage to the "just man Joseph" preserved her from suspicion and enabled the promised Redeemer, the very Son of God, to enter the world *apparently* in the ordinary way, as the fruit of a lawful and honorable marriage. The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God could not have been made public prior to His resurrection and the foundation of His Church, without either requiring such stupendous miracles as would deprive faith of all merit and practically frustrate the Redeemer's passion and death, or causing so frightful a scandal as would necessarily ruin beforehand the good name of Jesus Christ and His Church. God, in His infinite wisdom, had decreed that His Son should come on earth without

attracting any more notice than was required to legalize, in accordance with the prophecies, the fact of his ancestral lineage and of His birth at the time and place foretold centuries previously. St. Justin, philosopher and martyr, towards the middle of the second century, and Tertullian, the celebrated Christian writer about the end of the same century or the beginning of the third, attest in their writings that they had seen and examined in the archives kept in the Capitol in Rome, the Census Lists made under Cyrinus or Quirinus, governor of Syria (Luke 2. 1-4), and had found therein the record of the birth and lineage of Jesus Christ, together with the place of His birth.

God had, moreover, decreed that His divine Son should remain in obscurity on earth until the time appointed for beginning His public ministry among men. Therefore He appointed St. Joseph to be Mary's protector, helper, provider, friend and companion, and the Redeemer's worthy foster-father, and to support Him and His Virgin-Mother by his labor. Mary, who is rightly compared to the dawn of the day, like the dawn which derives its light from the day it announces, derives all her holiness, her perfection and her superiority over all creatures, from Jesus Christ, her divine Son.

"The angel, having come in, said unto her: HAIL, FULL OF GRACE, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Mary, most probably, was then alone engaged in prayer and meditation, when the angel entered bowing and saluting her in so remarkable a manner, and this, too, *in the name of God Himself,* whose messenger he was. We cannot find in all Scripture an example of a messenger of God saluting any other person than the Virgin Mary, whom the angel Gabriel greeted with such great reverence and praise. In fact, the angel greets Mary as one superior to himself. He calls her "full of grace." Grace is a supernatural gift, which we cannot of ourselves merit, but which God, in His goodness, imparts to man, to elevate his nature, to sanctify him, and to enable him to perform what is above his nature and powers and thus merit eternal happiness in heaven. The least degree of divine grace is worth more than the whole universe. It is, as it were, an infused supernatural, heavenly life; it makes us holy and pleasing to God, children of God and fits us to gain merit for heaven by our actions. And the angel declares to Mary that she is "full of grace." How holy and pleasing to God must she have been already then! Having been destined from all eternity to be the Mother of the Messias, the Son

of God, our divine Saviour, the very Author of grace, the Virgin Mary was so endowed by God as to be more pleasing to God than any other creature from the very first moment of her existence. It was, indeed, not only most becoming, but also necessary that the Mother of the Son of God, to be His worthy Mother, in the sight of God, of the angels and of men, should, from her very conception, have been immaculate and so enriched with a fulness of grace, of divine gifts, as to deserve the title given her by the Church of "Mother of divine grace." Wherefore we must hold with the Church that not only Mary's dignity as the Mother of the Son of God, but also the very honor of the Son of God Himself required that Mary from her very conception should have been immaculate and supereminently holy and pleasing to God, and never after have been stained with the slightest sin; hence she was also confirmed in grace. Mary was, indeed, full of grace at the very first moment of her existence, and she ever after remained faithful to grace, and by co-operating with divine grace constantly, her capacity for grace constantly increased from day to day, so that she ever remained "full of grace." When God's messenger came to her and greeted her as "full of grace," she had already acquired so sublime a degree of

holiness as to be, as far as is possible to a creature, worthy of becoming the Mother of the Son of God, of the Saviour of mankind. The angel, in the name of God Himself, praised her not for her corporeal beauty or her natural eminent qualities, or her royal lineage, but for her supernatural gifts and her correspondence therewith.

"THE LORD IS WITH THEE." This is not a wish, but an express declaration. From all eternity the Almighty had chosen her as the instrument to bring about the Redemption of fallen man through the Incarnation and birth of the Son of God. God, although the purest Spirit, by His immensity is in all beings, in all creatures, in all men; but He is *with* those only who are in the state of grace. God was *with* Mary from the first moment of her existence; he had so greatly sanctified her, that He always dwelt in her by His grace. On the day the angel greeted her as having "the Lord with her," God dwelt in her still more intimately and became her true Son, for then the prophecy was literally fulfilled that "a virgin shall conceive God with us," and the "Son of God" began to dwell in her *personally* and became truly "her Son."

"BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN." Mary was, indeed, blessed above all women on account of the heavenly favors God bestowed on her, her

supereminent virtues and sanctity, and God's choice of her as the mother of Him "who shall be called," and be truly "the Son of God" and the Saviour of mankind. The beginning of the curse of sin in man was from Eve, a woman, wherefore woman was thenceforth considered and treated in the world as an inferior being and as man's slave. But it was Mary, a woman, that was the beginning of the blessing restored to man and the means of raising woman above herself, not only by restoring her to the rank God had given her at creation as man's helpmate and companion, but also by raising her as a source of blessing to mankind by a life of virginity, of devotedness, and sacrifice for mankind's spiritual and temporal welfare. Mary is blessed above all women, for in her all women, whether married, widows or virgins, find a perfect model in the virtues of their state.

"Mary, having heard, was troubled at the angel's words, and thought within herself what manner of salutation this was." Mary, already the holiest of creatures, was also the most humble, and felt, therefore, worried and troubled at the wonderful praise so reverentially bestowed upon her by the angel. How different was her conduct from that of Eve. Eve, when she heard the serpent saying to her: "You shall be as

gods" (Gen. 3. 4), was filled with the ambition of being greater than she was, of being "as a god." She was light-minded and proud, and consequently fell into the trap Satan had set for her, and thus brought sin and its curse into the world. But Mary was both humble and prudent, and believed herself unworthy of such great praise, and feared lest like Eve she also might be led astray by undeserved praise. How different was Mary's conduct from ours. We are fond of praise and desire and seek it and are puffed up by even the most undeserved praise, and are crest-fallen at being unnoticed and not receiving the praise we consider as our due. The angel saw her trouble and undertook to re-assure her.

"And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God." By the sin of our first parents and also by their own sins all men had lost the grace of God and forfeited His friendship. And now Mary, by God's special favor towards her as the destined Mother of the Redeemer, and also by her prayers and yearning for His coming, had found the lost grace and divine friendship, not only for herself as the chosen Mother of the Redeemer, but also for all mankind.

"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His

name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." These were joyful tidings, indeed, that the time had now come when the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messias were about to be fulfilled. These prophecies regarded chiefly His conception by and birth from a virgin, His descent from David; for David and his reign were considered as figures of the Messias and His reign over the descendants of Abraham *according to the spirit.* St. Paul (Rom. 9. 7) makes an essential distinction between Isaac, the son of Abraham according to the divine promise, that is, according to the spirit, and Ismael his son according to the flesh, and the son of bondage. Hence St. Paul considers as true children of Abraham only those that are so according to the spirit. Hence the words of the angel concerning the eternal reign of the Messias in the house of Jacob did not refer to the *natural* descendants of Jacob, but to those according to the spirit, that is, all who would faithfully accept and live up to the teachings of the Messias, that is, to the Church of Christ and her members. "Of the reign of the Saviour in His Church there shall be

no end," says the Nicene Creed. By the words of His angel messenger God offered to Mary the most exalted dignity and the greatest honor in His power, the maternity of His divine Son, the Messias, the Saviour of the world, an honor, a dignity then desired and hoped for by every woman in Israel. Nevertheless, the humble Virgin was not dazzled by the offer, for

"Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done? because I know not man." Let us here admire Mary's tender love of virginity and her admirable humility. When she heard the wonderful salutation and praise of the angel, she was disturbed and as if bewildered at the praise she neither sought nor desired, and she was silent. But when she thought her virginity, which she had vowed to God, was at stake, she at once spoke out and objected her virginity to the offer the angel made her, for she was prepared to refuse the proffered sublime dignity, rather than forfeit her virginity so dear to her heart. How different was Mary from so many Christians who so easily and willingly barter their souls, their eternity for a trifle, a little worldly honor and distinction, pleasure, wealth, or a desirable marriage! Here Mary shows herself as the Virgin of virgins, as the worthy Queen of virgins. At the same time she is far from doubting or re-

fusing to believe what the angel said to her about the greatness of the Messias and His eternal kingdom. How different is she in this from Zachary, who asked the angel for a sign as a proof of the truth of his promise! Mary always showed herself a model of holy simplicity and faith.

"And the angel answering said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore also the Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." On this occasion the ineffable mystery of the Blessed Trinity, of one God in three distinct divine Persons, is revealed for the first time. The angel mentions: the *Holy Ghost* coming down upon Mary, the power of the Most High, *the Father,* overshadowing her, and the *Son* of God, to be conceived in her womb as her Son and become man. The Holy Ghost, who is the mutual Love of the Father and the Son, is the medium of the Incarnation of the Son of God, this sublime work of divine love and grace. Through Him all holiness and the childship of God come to us. The almighty power of God the Father will work the miracle of the Incarnation. Mary's inviolate virginity was prefigured, first by the burning bush seen by Moses (Exod. 3. 2), which burned without being consumed; Mary became a mother and

her virginity remained inviolate; secondly, by the fleece of Gideon, which remained dry, while everything around it was covered with a heavy dew; Mary's motherhood respected her virginity; again, the fleece alone was wet with dew, when all its surroundings remained perfectly dry (Judges 6. 37–40); Mary's virginity alone could be joined to motherhood; thirdly, Mary's virginity was figured by the woman clothed with the sun (Apoc. 12. 1), the sun representing Jesus Christ, Mary's Son. Therefore, "the blessed fruit of Mary's womb" miraculously conceived by the Divine Power and the Divine Love, deserves even in His human nature to be called the Son of God. Consequently, the Son of Mary is truly and indeed the Son of God; and since Mary's Son is true God, Mary is clearly entitled to be called the Mother of God.

"And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God." Although Mary did not doubt the angel's explanation concerning her becoming the Mother of the Son of God without detriment to her virginity, and had not asked, like Zachary, for a sign in proof of the angel's declaration, nevertheless, partly as a reward for her faith and her submis-

sion to God's holy will in choosing her to be the Mother of His divine Son, the long promised and expected Saviour of mankind, a sign was given her, and partly to enable her to share in the very first act in the Redeemer's mission, the sanctification of His precursor before his very birth. It was indeed befitting that the Saviour's Mother should know her Son's precursor, and follow the divine inspiration to betake herself to Elizabeth and become the medium of his sanctification, and thus inaugurate her future office in the Church as Mediatress of mankind with her divine Son. The angel after having thus spoken to Mary, awaited in silence her answer and consent to God's choice of her as the Mother of His divine Son, the promised Saviour, who was to wed or assume our human nature, in order to redeem mankind, for such was the object of the angel's mission to Mary. In this all-important matter Mary was under no compulsion or fear, but was perfectly free, for God compels no one against his will. Adam, the ancestor of the human race, by abusing his free-will and disobeying God, had lost for both himself and his posterity, God's grace and friendship and forfeited all rights to eternal happiness. But divine grace and friendship, and heavenly happiness could be recovered only through the proper use of the free-will of her who

was the fittest person to bring into the world the "Holy One, the Son of God," to repair the evil consequences of Adam's disobedience and satisfy the offended divine justice. There never had been, nor shall there ever be so important an affair depending on the consent of a creature, as that which awaited Mary's reply and consent. The eternal welfare of the whole human race depended thereon. How anxiously did Gabriel and all the angels of the heavenly court await Mary's reply! And how grateful should we be to her for having in this proved herself the Virgin most prudent and faithful!

"And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." Mary's consent so humbly given deserves our admiration and our gratitude on account of the infinite benefits it has conferred on mankind. Knowing the necessity of her consent for our salvation, she is not elated by the sublime honor and dignity it would acquire for her, she gives it most humbly, submitting in perfect obedience to the divine decree. And how powerful is Mary's *fiat,* "Be it done." It is as powerful as, and even more powerful than God's *fiat,* "let there be," at the creation. When God says *fiat,* it is not a mere word, but an infinite action, for it creates, gives existence to what was not. But

Mary's *fiat* acted not on a creature, but its effect reached God Himself, and caused the Son of God to assume human nature and become man in her chaste womb, and made herself the Mother of the Son of God, of her Creator and Saviour, and enabled the Son of God to begin the work of our Redemption: ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST: "AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH" (John 1. 14).

"And the angel departed from her," who had thus become the Mother of the Son of God, and the wonder and admiration of heaven itself, for henceforth no one was or could be so near to God Himself as His Mother!

II. THE VISITATION

"THE MOTHER OF MY LORD" (Luke 1. 43)

This mystery is immediately connected with the Annunciation. In each the divine Maternity of Mary is clearly set forth; in the one *before,* in the other *after* the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the Annunciation the angel Gabriel, God's messenger, asks Mary's consent to become the Mother of the promised and long expected Messias, the very Son of God; in the Visitation Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost," praises Mary for having given her consent, and testifies to the sanctification of the Messias' precursor at the sound of Mary's greeting, and openly declares her to be "the Mother of my Lord," that is, of God.

"Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda." Mary after the Annunciation and the Incarnation of the Son of God, is believed to have spent a few days in retirement and thanksgiving. Why did she undertake that journey? First, in obedience to a special divine inspiration, and secondly, on

account of her friendship for Elizabeth, and also, out of love and charity, to assist her. It is believed that Mary did not travel by the ordinary roads, but by by-paths, in order to be alone and commune more freely with God. She hastened on her way, to escape notice. In this she serves as a model to young women, who are naturally fond of company and display. How her heart was glowing with divine love during her journey, for she bore with her the very Son of God!

"She entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth." Mary, ever humble, saluted first. Her exaltation to the dignity of Mother of the Messias, the Son of God, far from filling her with pride, only rendered her more humble. St. Bernard observes that humility is far more necessary than virginity, for though the latter is most admirable, yet is not necessary to salvation; whilst humility is so necessary, that no one can be saved without it.

"It came to pass that, when Elizabeth heard Mary's salutation, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation

sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou, because thou hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Let us now consider one after the other the wonders that took place when the Virgin Mary greeted Elizabeth. In the first place, at the very sound of Mary's voice the yet unborn infant precursor leaped for joy, as Elizabeth herself declared. And why did he do this? Because, as the angel had told Zachary, his father, he was sanctified then by the very presence of the unborn Saviour who had assumed human nature in order to save and sanctify mankind. The sanctification of His precursor was the first fruit of His redemption. And how was it effected? *Through the Saviour's Mother, the Virgin Mary,* "at the sound of her voice." Behold, then, a proof of Mary's share in the redemption! It was Jesus that performed the miracle and sanctified His yet unborn precursor, but this He accomplished through His Mother's instrumentality, through her greeting. In the next place, at the very sound of Mary's voice Elizabeth "was filled with the Holy Ghost," and acquainted by Him of the Incarnation "of the Son of the Most High," of Mary's wonderful divine Maternity and of all that the messenger of God, the angel Gabriel, had

said to the Virgin, and under this divine inspiration Elizabeth loudly proclaimed the sublime dignity of Mary by calling her "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "the Mother of my God," and declared her more blessed and more holy than all women, as God's messenger had previously done: "BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN," adding, at the same time: "AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB." Finally, Elizabeth, still "filled with the Holy Ghost," eulogized Mary's faith in all that the angel had said to her, and prophesied to her the fulfilment of all that the Lord had said to her by His angel: "Blessed art thou, because thou hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Let us now reflect for a few moments on what we have learned from the Gospel about the Blessed Virgin. The Gospel clearly testifies that it was God Himself who was the first publicly to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary by sending to her His angel to treat with her concerning the Incarnation of His divine Son; the second was the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, through St. Elizabeth, whom He enlightened and inspired to proclaim Mary as the "Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God," and as "the most blessed among women," and as the

medium of the Messias in His precursor's sanctification. With these examples of God the Father and of God the Holy Ghost, are not we Catholics not merely perfectly justified but even in duty bound to call Mary and honor her as "the Mother of God"? Did not Mary bear in her chaste womb for nine months the "Holy One," who is "the Son of the Most High," and then bring Him into the world to redeem and save mankind? And may we not justly implore the intercession and assistance of her whom the Holy Ghost, through St. Elizabeth proclaimed as the channel of grace and salvation? "Whence is this to me," exclaimed St. Elizabeth, "*filled with the Holy Ghost,* that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? *As soon as* the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." They who refuse to call Mary "the Mother of their Lord" or "blessed among women," or will not honor or invoke her as such, are most assuredly "not filled with the Holy Ghost," or inspired by Him, but by quite a different spirit! However greatly Mary was honored by God, by the Holy Ghost, nevertheless, she is neither proud nor conceited, for she seeks for herself neither honor nor praise, but, like the psalmist, she refers all the glory to God: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name

give glory" (Ps. 113. 1). The unborn precursor had exulted at the sound of Mary's voice and at the presence of Him whose precursor he was destined to be, and now Mary also exults and commences her admirable canticle of thanksgiving.

THE MAGNIFICAT

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour." Mary, with all her humility, could not deny the truth of the wonderful praise Elizabeth had bestowed upon her, but she refers all the glory to God, and rejoices (exults) in her Saviour, in her divine Son. How well she teaches us that in God alone, and not in this world's joys and goods can be found real joy and happiness!

"Because He hath regarded the humility (lowliness) of His handmaid." Mary, far from being elated by her sublime dignity, acknowledges her nothingness before God, for all her gifts and graces are only gratuitous gifts of the Almighty, and, like St. Paul, she glories in her infirmities and weakness: "I will glory in my infirmities (weakness), that the power of Christ may dwell in me, for when I am weak, then I am powerful" (1 Cor. 12. 9, 10).

"For behold from henceforth *all* generations shall call me blessed." These words are a real prophecy, which has ever since been fulfilled in

the Catholic Church, whose members all designate and honor Mary as "the *Blessed* Virgin, the Mother of God." (See below under the heading of *Mary, Mother of God,* how in the Catholic Church Mary's prophecy is fulfilled).

"Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is His name." From all eternity God had destined Mary to be the Mother of His divine Son as the Saviour of mankind. She was mentioned by Him in the very beginning of the world, immediately after the fall of our first parents as the woman who should crush the serpent's head and bring forth Him who would repair the fall and restore to mankind God's friendship. Later on she was at diverse times announced by numerous prophecies and figures in the Old Testament; to fit her for her sublime dignity, God had preserved her from original sin, endowed her with the fulness of grace, confirmed her in grace, filled her with the Holy Ghost, and made her the Mother of His divine Son without detriment to her virginity. In this manner God raised her to the highest holiness and perfection, made her a relative, so to speak, of the Deity, preserved from corruption after death her body which had borne the Man-God, assumed her in both body and soul into heaven, exalted her above all the angels and saints, so that God alone is

above her, and she is there also as our Advocate, our spiritual Mother, the Mother of mercy, the Refuge of sinners, the Perpetual Help of Christians and the Queen of angels and saints. How great things has not the Almighty done for Mary! How greatly has He honored her. He did not think that He was doing too much to honor the Mother of His Son. We read in the sixth chapter of the Book of Esther that King Assuerus, being reminded how Mordechai had discovered a conspiracy and saved his life, inquired concerning how he should show his gratitude by publicly honoring him, saying: "What ought to be done to the man whom the king is desirous to honor?" The answer he received was this: "The man whom the king desireth to honor ought to be clothed with the king's apparel, and to be set upon the horse the king rideth upon, and to have the royal crown upon his head, and let the first of the king's princes and nobles hold his horse, and going through the street of the city, proclaim before him and say: thus shall he be honored whom the king hath a mind to honor" (Esther 6. 6–9). In like manner, God appoints His priests to call the attention of those who believe in Him to the divine Maternity and holiness of Mary and all the honor He Himself has shown her and confers on her in heaven, and then to say to them:

"Thus shall be honored she who is full of grace, blessed among women and the worthy Mother of the Son of God." God, who has done so much for Mary, has done very much for us also, as Mary reminds us.

"His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear Him." Before Mary the psalmist had sung: "The Lord is sweet to all; and His tender mercies are over (above) all His works" (Ps. 144. 9). His mercy is, indeed, boundless. Its extent: its length is eternal; its breadth includes all graces, all men, all places; its height reaches to the most sublime graces prepared not for the angels only, but even for us, poor sinners; its depth reaches the incomprehensible humiliations of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of the Virgin Mary, His wonderful longanimity towards sinners, which knows how to draw good out of evil. The only condition to secure mercy is "to fear God." Mary's mercy is likewise, in some manner, boundless; she is a sweet Mother to even the greatest sinners who desire to amend, and obtains for them conversion, the divine forgiveness, perseverance and heaven.

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat," continues Mary, "and hath exalted the humble; He hath filled the hungry with good things, and hath sent the rich away empty."

How differently, and yet how justly, does the infinitely good and just God treat the humble and the proud, and the virtuous lowly poor and the wicked rich and worldly great! "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5. 5). In concluding her admirable canticle, Mary, filled with patriotic fervor, praises God's fidelity to His promises, saying: "He hath received Israel, His servant, being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever." By these words Mary alludes to the Messias, to His Incarnation and also to its first fruit in the sanctification of the Precursor, in fulfilment of the divine promises and prophecies.

"BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB, JESUS"

(From Val d'Eremas)

Jesus is infinitely above and beyond all comparison. Mary, however, exalted, is yet only a creature of God. But Jesus is infinitely more. As to His human nature He is only a creature. He called Himself the Son of man to designate His humanity. He is also God, because in Him the human nature is inseparably united to the divine nature in only one personality, that of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus is God from all eternity of the substance of the Father; He is Man born in time of the substance of His Mother Mary, made from it and out of it by the creative power and act of the Most Holy Trinity. Between Jesus and Mary there is the most perfect physical relation, for there is no closer physical relation than between mother and child. The angel said to Mary: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the

power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy One that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1. 31, 35). And when Elizabeth said to Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Ibid. 42), the Holy Ghost had already come down upon Mary and the power of the Most High had already overshadowed her, and therefore Mary was already, as Elizabeth declared, "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God," and, consequently, the "Holy One" that was to be born of her, was truly "the Son of God."

Jesus is God, the very Author, Source, Origin and Giver of all blessings. Of His blessings we all and each have a share; of His fulness Mary and we all have received. In Him are all blessings to be found; without Him there is neither nor can be any blessing for any one or in any one. "Of His fulness we all have received" (John 1. 16). There is no greater nor better work than the Man-God. "In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Divinity (Godhead) corporeally" (Col. 2. 9); fulness of grace, the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier, the absolute Mediator and Intercessor of mankind. His death reconciles us with God, His blood atones for our sins, His resurrection restores our fallen nature, His ascension places Him in His body at the right

hand of the Father, and makes His human nature the highest in power and glory after the Deity.

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus," said the angel to Mary (Luke 1. 23); the same was said by an angel to Joseph also (Mat. 1. 31). And the name Jesus was accordingly bestowed upon Him at His circumcision (Luke 2. 21). The name Jesus is an adorable name, because it is above all names, and "there is no other name given to men in which we must be saved, nor is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4. 12). "Tasteless to me," says St. Bernard, "is all spiritual food, if it is not enriched with the oil of this name; insipid, if not flavored with this salt. If thou writest, I enjoy it not, except I read Jesus in it; if thou conversest, it pleaseth me not, except I hear Jesus. Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rapture in the heart. It is, moreover, a medicine. If any one is sad, let Jesus enter his heart and thence ascend to his mouth, and lo! at the rising of this light the mists are scattered, and the sunshine appears. Has any one committed a crime, or does he even rush in despair to the halter of death; but if he invokes this name of life, will he not again breathe the breath of life? When I pronounce the name of Jesus, I recall that humble Man, meek of heart, full of kindness, sober, chaste, merciful, in a word,

the Man adorned with all virtues and, at the same time, the almighty God, from whom I expect all the assistance I need for my salvation. Let us then adore and reverence this name, which dissipates the fumes of pride, tempers the thirst of avarice, extinguishes the flames of lust, restrains the impetuosity of anger, heals the wounds of jealousy, the name, in short, which will save those who pronounce it."

"Wherefore, God also hath exalted Him and hath given Him a name, which is above all names, that, at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of all who are in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of the Father" (Phil. 2. 8–10).

THE NAME OF JESUS

(Sketch)

1. "The name of Jesus," says St. Bernardine of Siena, "is a short word, but very comprehensive and full of mysteries." It means Saviour, Redeemer. Hence it is a most holy name, the name of the Son of God. It comes from heaven, from God Himself, for the angel Gabriel, God's messenger, said to Mary: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus" (Luke 1. 31). And the angel who appeared to Joseph, said to him: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Mat. 1. 21). Hence there is no name greater or more holy than the name of Jesus on account of its meaning and of Him who bears it, the very Son of God.

2. There is no name more powerful. "God hath given Him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those who are in Heaven, on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2. 9, 10). "The name of Jesus," says Origen, "has, indeed, great power against devils, even when invoked by sinful men."

Christ, before ascending to heaven, gave to His apostles the power to cast out devils and perform other miracles in His name (Mark 16. 17). The first miracle performed by the apostles was performed by St. Peter "in the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts. 3. 6). To the devil St. Paul said one day: "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to go out from her. And he went out at the same hour" (Acts 16. 18). "The name of Jesus," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "is a means of overcoming all dangers."

3. The name of Jesus is a name of sweetness and consolation, as is experienced by all who devoutly pronounce it. "He who does not experience sweetness in pronouncing the name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "is either spiritually dead or steeped in tepidity."

4. The name of Jesus is deserving of our veneration and love. "In the name of Jesus," says St. Paul, "every knee should bend" (Phil. 2. 9). It is, moreover, the name of Him, who for the love of us became man and died on the cross to save us, poor, ungrateful sinners. How much should we love it and with how great fervor should we invoke it! "Are you sick," says St. Laurence Justinian, "in suffering, or assailed by blasphemous thoughts or despair, or disturbed by fear, anxiety, perplexity; or are you in solitude, travel-

ing, in danger on land or on sea, wherever you are, invoke the holy name of Jesus, not merely with your lips, but from your inmost heart." In fact, what a magnificent promise has Jesus made to those who pray in His name! "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you" (John 16. 23).

Let us often salute, with St. Francis de Sales, the Holy Name of Jesus: "O divine, glorious and powerful name! Impress thyself in our souls, and be inscribed thereon, so that through thee they may be worthy of salvation."

THE NAME OF JESUS

(Sketch)

The name of Jesus is

1. A divine name, for it could come only from God Himself, and it can be pronounced with merit, only through divine grace. "No one can say, Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12. 3).

2. A name deserving of veneration: "In the name of Jesus every knee should bend" (Phil. 2. 10).

3. A sacred name: "In the name of Jesus they shall cast out devils" (Mark 16. 17).

4. A name imparting strength: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk" (Acts 3. 6).

5. A salutary name: "Having heard these things, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19. 5).

6. An almighty name: "Amen, amen I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you" (John 16. 23).

7. A glorious name: "This man is to Me a

vessel of election to carry My name before the Gentiles" (Acts 9. 15).

8. An honorable name: "They went rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts 5. 41).

9. An incomparable name: "There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4. 12).

HOLY MARY

God is infinitely holy. The angels, in awe before Him, constantly honor and adore Him, chanting: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts." A spotless holiness is required to be admitted to the vision and enjoyment of God in heaven. The holier the saint, the holier the angel, the nearer he approaches the throne of God. Of all creatures Mary is the holiest, because God, having destined her as the Mother of His divine Son, sanctified her in a unique manner, that she might be a fit dwelling for the Incarnate Word: "The Most High hath sanctified His own tabernacle" (Ps. 45. 5). Mary is the Mother of God, and therefore must the most closely resemble her divine Son, that she might be fit and worthy to be His Mother.

Mary, therefore, was endowed and adorned with all the virtues and with the gifts of the Holy Ghost in a supreme and heroic degree; from the very first moment of her existence, she surpassed in holiness all the angels and saints combined. God bestowed on her at every moment of her life

an abundance of divine grace, and she every moment increased in holiness by her most faithful co-operation with every grace. Hence she was always full of grace and, at the same time, increased every moment in grace and merits, and her capacity for grace constantly increased at the same time in the same proportion.

Moreover, Mary never contracted the least stain of sin, not even the stain of original sin. Of her the Holy Ghost says: "My perfect one is but one" (Cant. 6. 8). "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee" (Cant. 4. 7). Mary was preserved from original sin and from all actual sin through the merits of her divine Son, our Saviour. She was, indeed, redeemed by Him, but in a more noble manner than the rest of mankind; for she who was to "crush the serpent's head" (Gen. 3. 15), never was nor should be in the serpent's power, for by the merits of her divine Son, she was preserved from contracting original sin and confirmed in grace. As Mother of God she should enjoy privileges and favors bestowed on no one else, and this besides receiving every spiritual favor ever conferred on a creature, human or angelic. To her are evidently applied the following texts of Holy Scripture: "I, the Lord, have called thee in justice and taken thee by the hand and preserved thee"

from original sin (Is. 42. 6); "Nothing defiled cometh into her, for she is the brightness of the eternal light and the unspotted mirror" (Wisd. 7. 25, 26). God loved, honored, respected and esteemed her at the very beginning of her life, for already then she was destined to be the Mother of the Son of God, and was, *therefore,* already endowed with a supereminent degree of sanctifying grace, superior to that of all creatures combined. She could say with St. Paul, but with greater reason: "By the grace of God I am what I am; His grace was not void in me" (1 Cor. 15. 10). From the very first moment of her existence she was a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1. 4), and a worthy "heir of God" (Rom. 8. 17).

But all her gifts, all her beauty, were all within: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within" (Ps. 44. 14). Unlike the apostles and apostolic men, she lived in humble retirement and performed no miracles, nor engaged in conspicuous and glorious deeds, but led apparently but an ordinary good and virtuous life, discharging her domestic duties. Most profound and sincere was her humility, as we have seen above. Next to the humility of the Saviour, her divine Son, was the humility of His Mother. It was unsurpassed, unequaled by any creature, just as her holiness is unequaled by any creature. The Church

chants of her: "By her virginity Mary pleased God, but by her humility, she conceived the Son of God." This means that although Mary's virginity was very pleasing to God, yet God chose her to be the Mother of His Son on account of her unparalleled humility, for such a humility was a proof of her unparalleled holiness, which fitted her to be the Mother of the Saviour of mankind. The more humble a person is, the more holy also is that person, for one's holiness is in proportion to his humility. Mary's very vow of virginity proves her incomparable humility, for she showed thereby that she had not the ambition then shared by all the other daughters of Juda, of becoming the Mother of the long expected Messias; she, in fact, felt convinced that she was too unworthy of such a great dignity. She rather desired to be the servant, the very slave of the happy woman who should be chosen as the Mother of the "Desired of nations." Behold her at the Annunciation. How she is troubled at the words of praise addressed to her by the angel, for even the least praise of her was painful to her great humility. But how this painful feeling was still more increased when she learned that she was the chosen one. Nothing but the express will of God could have prevailed upon her to consent to be invested with so sublime a dignity. Moreover,

how beautifully does her humility shine forth in giving her consent, for she calls herself a mere servant of God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

At the Visitation also her humility shines forth. She is now the Mother of the promised Saviour of mankind, and yet she hastens to the assistance of her cousin, St. Elizabeth, ready to perform for her the most menial services. At her arrival she salutes Elizabeth first. And when Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost, breaks forth in praises and congratulations to her, and loudly proclaims the wonderful effects that followed the sound of Mary's salutation, Mary accepts nothing of all this for herself, but refers all the honor and glory to God, saying: "My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . because He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid."

We have another most beautiful example of her great humility in her Purification, in which she renounced, so to speak, what every one holds as his most precious good in this world, her honor. She, the spotless Virgin, appeared in this legal ceremony prescribed for ordinary mothers, not as the purest of virgins that she was, but merely as an ordinary mother. "Grace," says St. Augustine, "had raised Mary above the Old Law, but her humility placed her under it." There never

has been nor shall be in any creature so great and heroic a humility as Mary's, and therefore there never has been nor shall be in any creature so great a holiness as Mary's. Therefore it is meet and just to address Mary with the title given her by the Church of "Holy Mary."

THE NAME OF MARY

"The name of the virgin was Mary" (Luke 1. 27). This humble, obscure virgin, chosen by God to be the Mother of His divine Son, the Saviour of mankind, uttered a remarkable prophecy: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Ibid. 48). This prophecy has ever since been literally fulfilled, for her most usual appellation is "the Blessed Virgin." Her name is universally revered, honored and invoked throughout the Church of Jesus Christ, for

1. It is a *holy name,* next in holiness to that of Jesus. It is the name of the most holy of creatures, of her who is the purest, the most virtuous and full of merits. "Mary's name," says St. Peter Chrysologus," recalls all that is pure and chaste. She was the first to consecrate her virginity to God. No one has been more generous and self-sacrificing, or loved God and the neighbor more than she. She is the summary or compendium of holiness."

2. The name of Mary is a *glorious name,* for no

other name was so great in ancient times. Eve, Sara, Judith, Esther were but weak figures of Mary, the spiritual Mother of mankind and the true Mother of our divine Saviour, the Son of God, for she who is the Mother of God, is endowed with the most sublime of dignities and is entitled to be the Queen of heaven and earth.

3. It is a *powerful name,* for it is the name of her who "crushed the serpent's head" and is, therefore, the terror of hell. Her Immaculate Conception broke the power of Satan over mankind, and, therefore, was the forerunner of the death of Jesus Christ which deprived Satan of his power over fallen man. It is the name of her who is omnipotent by her prayer, for she is the Mother of God. To please His Mother, Jesus Christ, the most dutiful of sons, anticipated the time for working miracles. God who has promised to hear the prayer of a repentant sinner, cannot refuse to hear the prayers of His Mother, whom He honors and loves more than a son can love his mother. The proofs of Mary's boundless influence with her divine Son are visible not only in the wonders of Lourdes, Loreto and many other places of pilgrimage in her honor, but also in the holy and chaste life of the religious, of the Catholic clergy and of her devoted clients.

4. The name of Mary is a *sweet name.* To

good children their mother's name is sweet. By Christ's last will Mary is our Mother also. She is the most loving, tender and compassionate of mothers toward all her spiritual children, for at what price did she become our spiritual mother? For this she had to undergo the most painful interior agony in seeing her Son and her God dying the most cruel and ignominious death for us, whom her Son entrusted to her as her spiritual children. There never was a sorrow like unto her sorrow, when she became our spiritual Mother. A good mother feels greater love and compassion for the children who have caused her most pain, or who are the most helpless. Hence she is the most loving of mothers, and her name should be sweet to us, and we should go to her with the simplicity and confidence of little children in all our trials, sufferings, dangers and temptations for her help and protection.

5. To him who frequently and devoutly pronounces her holy name, and especially often says the Hail Mary, her name invoked at the hour of his death will prove a great consolation and a protection against all temptations in that terrible hour on which depends his eternal destiny, for she who "crushed the serpent's head" will help him to overcome Satan's last assaults and obtain for him a judgment of mercy from her divine Son.

HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Had it been given to you to choose your own mother, and to endow her from her very birth with all the gifts, good qualities and attainments you could think of, what would you have made her? You would most assuredly have made her what you would consider as the paragon of perfection. But Mary is the Mother of God, for the angel sent by God said to her: "The Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1. 35); and St. "Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost," called her "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God." If God Himself through His angel and through St. Elizabeth, called Mary "the Mother of God," it is both *our right* and *our duty* to call and invoke her as "the Mother of God." The psalmist represents God the Father saying to the Messias: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" (Ps. 109). At the baptism of Christ the heavens opened, and the voice of the heavenly Father was heard saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Luke 3. 22); and at Christ's

Transfiguration on Mount Thabor, the heavenly Father again said: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mat. 17. 5). But the SAME JESUS, whom the Father declares to be "His own beloved Son," is also the SON OF MARY. Hence she can truly say of Him: "He whom the heavenly Father calls His own beloved Son, is also truly my Son, and I alone of all creatures can say to Him: 'Jesus, Thou art both my Son and my God.'" Mary is the nearest relative of Jesus, because she is His Mother and has given birth to Him. Hence St. Peter Damian says: "The Son of God dwelt in Mary, and therefore has an identity of substance with her." To Mary alone can the Son of God say: "Thou art My Mother, and I am thy Son." The Venerable Bede says: "The very Son of God, conceived in the Virgin's womb, drew His flesh from her flesh, for He could not be a man, unless He had a human origin." To become our Saviour, the Son of God had to become man and have a human origin; and from all eternity Mary had been destined to be His Mother. Therefore, Mary is truly the Mother of God and deserves this name by the right of maternity.

Mary, then, is exalted above all creatures. The dignity of Mother of God is the greatest, the most sublime dignity that can be conferred on a crea-

ture. "God," says St. Bonaventure, "can create millions of worlds greater and more perfect than this one; but He cannot create a dignity greater or more perfect than the Divine Maternity." "The divine Maternity," says Pope Pius IX, "is the crown of all the wonders of God." But she whom God chose to be His own Mother, must have been made by Him such as to be worthy of His respect and love immeasurably above every other creature. The Mother of God should, then, be more pure and more holy than any other creature, and, in fact, should be next to God Himself in purity and holiness, and should be such as to reflect honor on God Himself for having her as His Mother. But let us bear in mind that God, the infinite Wisdom, does not, as we do, regard or place stress on mere corporeal or physical beauty, earthly riches, fine garments, intellectual attainments, popularity, influence or high station in life, for all these things are but as vile dust in comparison with virtue, innocence, holiness and moral beauty and worth. These virtues and spiritual qualities, and these only count with God and draw His love and respect. Moreover the Mother of God could not deserve the respect, love and veneration of angels and men required by her sublime dignity, were she stained with slight faults or failings or subject to any moral

weakness. Therefore, it behooves that the Mother of God should be preserved from every stain of sin or fault even from the very first moment of her life, and, besides, be confirmed in grace and free from all sin during her whole life, and, moreover, be endowed with the highest degree of grace, or, as the angel expressed it in his greeting, should always be "full of grace," according to her capacity. Were it otherwise, the contempt and astonishment resulting from any moral weakness or imperfection on her part, would redound to the injury and dishonor of God Himself, for not honoring His Mother, as her intimate relation to Himself required. From this it follows also that they who wilfully belittle the Mother of God and refuse to give her the honor due to her dignity and intimate relation to God, the honor taught us by God's example, such persons necessarily displease and dishonor God Himself.

The Son of God, as the Son of Mary, was, without doubt, the best, the most dutiful of sons, for He was on earth our Model in all the virtues. Therefore, no son ever honored or loved his mother as much and as perfectly as Jesus honored and loved His Mother Mary. A dutiful son is greatly pleased and rejoices to see his good mother universally respected and esteemed, for

he considers her interests and her welfare as his own, and does all he can to promote them, since the honor shown to his mother redounds to his own honor. In like manner, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, is pleased to see all who believe in Him, revering, honoring and confiding in His Mother, and considers it all as done to Himself. Does He not say: "Whatever you have done to the least of Mine, you have done it unto Me?" (Mat. 25. 40). Is not Mary incomparably more to Jesus, her Son, than "the least" of His disciples? He surely not only is pleased to see His Mother honored as her sublime dignity requires, but expressly wills us to give due honor to her. And since He considers the honor we give her as given to Himself, and since He is our Model in all things, we should consider Him as prescribing the honor He Himself paid to her as the model of the honor we owe her. Hence we may here apply to Mary the question of King Assuerus: "What ought to be done to the man whom the king is desirous to honor?" (Esther 6. 6). "What honor should we pay to her whom the Son of God wishes to honor?"

The Protestant, as such, replies: "No honor at all, for to honor her would derogate from the honor due to God, and be a kind of idolatry!" But what answer does the Catholic Church give to

this question? The Catholic Church answers it by fulfilling Mary's own prophecy: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke 1. 48). The Popes, the bishops, the doctors, the saints and the faithful of the Church have ever since the day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles in the form of fiery tongues, and enabled them to found the Church, vied with one another in honoring her whom God Himself had called "blessed," and have given her as her principal titles, "The Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God." In her honor the Catholic Church has instituted feasts, erected churches and altars, made use of the finest productions of art in painting, sculpture, architecture, music; Mary is honored in the Divine Office, in numerous prayers and devotions, in her shrines, by pilgrimages, sermons, learned works, sodalities, the wearing of scapulars, medals, the recitation of the Angelus, of the Rosary, and other prayers; her name is invoked next to that of Jesus, with faith, confidence and love, in both spiritual and temporal wants, by the good, by sinners for the grace of conversion, by the sick, the afflicted, the dying, and all this with wonderful results, so that numerous are the beautiful titles given her in gratitude for favors re-

ceived through her powerful intercession. And what is more, countless are those who strive to imitate her virtues and consecrate their virginity like her to God and devote their whole life to the service of the poor, the sick, the forsaken, to the relief of all the ills by which poor human nature is afflicted. And this does not derogate from the honor and love we owe to our Divine Saviour; on the contrary, experience proves that they who love and honor Mary the most, are the very ones who also love and honor Jesus Christ the most. Moreover, however much we may honor Mary, we can never honor her as much as God Himself has honored her. Hence of the honor we pay to Mary we may say: "This honor is she worthy of, whom the Lord of heaven and earth has deemed worthy to choose as the Mother of His Divine Son!"

PRAY FOR US SINNERS

"I believe in the Communion of Saints." This is an article of the Apostles' Creed, which every Christian is bound to believe. All who have been baptized have been incorporated in the same family, the Church of Jesus Christ, of which God is the Father, and they are all brethren in Jesus Christ, members of the same body, of which Jesus Christ is the Head. As there is but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4. 5, 6), and Christ instituted baptism *in* and *for His Church, all* who are *validly baptized* become thereby *members of the Church,* Christ's mystical body, and remain so until by some wilful act they renounce the faith of the Church. Wherefore the Communion of Saints includes not only the members of the Church on earth, but also all the souls departed who are in heaven or in purgatory. They have the same Father in heaven, God; the same Mother, the Church; and heaven is either already, or is destined to be their permanent home with their heavenly Father; and they are united together as

forming one family, as being members of one and the same body, of which Christ is the Head (Col. 1. 18). They are divided into three classes. The first class is called the Church Triumphant; its members are already in heaven enjoying their victory, their triumph over every obstacle; the second class is called the Church Suffering, for its members are suffering in purgatory until they have done penance for the light sins which they had not sufficiently atoned for, when death removed them from this world. To the third class belong all the members of the Catholic Church who are yet living in this world. It is called the Church Militant, because all its members have to combat and conquer the temptations of the devil, the allurements of the world and also their own evil inclinations and passions. Their life is a constant warfare. All these three classes are united in one family, as members of one and the same body, and mutually help and care for one another, just as the members of our body do for one another. The members of the Church Triumphant, having already reached the happy home of their Father, stand in no need of help, but are most willing to help the members of the other two classes, and they are able to do so, because, being the friends and beloved children of God, they possess influence over Him, and He takes delight

in pleasing them by granting all they ask for in favor of their fellow-members in need. The members of the Church Suffering, being unable to help themselves, are helped by their other fellow members in heaven and on earth. As to the members of the Church Militant, they are able to assist their fellow-members both on earth and in purgatory by different means, and especially by their prayers. But as they are constantly engaged in combating their enemies and often in danger of being overcome, they need the help of the members of the Church Triumphant, and therefore invoke them in their needs with confidence, for they know that the saints in heaven, being now secure of their own salvation, are also solicitous for the salvation of their fellow-members on earth, and that they will obtain for them the needed assistance from God, who refuses nothing to the prayers of His elect. Such is the teaching of Holy Scripture, such the teaching of the Church of Jesus Christ. "We, being many," says St. Paul, "are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another" (Rom. 12. 5). "We are members of one another" (Eph. 4. 25). "My servant Job shall pray for you; his face will I accept. . . . The Lord accepted the face of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42. 8, 10). The saints and angels in heaven take great inter-

est in us who are on earth, for, says our divine Saviour, "I say to you that there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (Luke 15. 7). Judas Machabeus, the great Jewish patriot, related to his little army the vision he had seen: "Onias, who had been high-priest, a good and virtuous man, holding up his hands, prayed for all the people of the Jews. After this there appeared also another man, admirable for age and glory, environed with great beauty and majesty. Then Onias said: "This is a lover of his people and of the people of Israel; this is he that prayeth much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias, the prophet of God" (2 Mach. 15. 12–14).

The saints in heaven remember that they once formed a part of the Church Militant, that they had then to struggle long and hard against the world, the devil and their own passions in order to gain heaven. They are now in heaven the intimate friends of God, sharing His own happiness and very much honored and loved by Him; hence they have great influence with Him and know that He will not refuse to grant them all they ask of Him. They are, moreover, zealous for His glory and long to see Him loved and faithfully served by all men. They also take a deep interest

in their fellow-men on earth, in the souls redeemed by the sufferings and death of the Son of God, and ardently desire to see all men saved and become their happy companions in heaven. They rejoice very much as Jesus Christ Himself declares, when a sinner on earth does penance. Therefore the saints in heaven are always ready to help us by their prayers, as the high-priest Onias and the prophet Jeremias prayed for the Israelites in their need. They pray especially for those who call upon them for help; and God will surely honor His saints by granting them whatever they pray for, since He has promised to grant even to us, sinners, whatsoever we ask for in the name of Jesus Christ.

But no one in heaven is more willing to pray for us than Mary, the Mother of God, and our own spiritual Mother also. She is more desirous than all the saints and angels to see God loved and served by all men, to see all men saved for whom her divine Son suffered and died. Moreover, she possesses greater influence and power with God than all the saints and angels combined. The saints are only God's servants and friends; but Mary is the Mother of God, and God cannot refuse the prayers of His Mother. Therefore, we have every reason to confide in her prayers for us. We have in the Gospel a beautiful example of Mary's

willingness to help those in need, and of her power and influence with her divine Son.

The Marriage at Cana in Galilee. Every act of Jesus Christ on earth had a definite purpose determined upon by God from all eternity. The object or purpose of His first miracle was not merely to come to the relief of the married couple, and gain the confidence of His first disciples, but chiefly to manifest His Mother's kind heart and her so great influence over Him, that He could not refuse to gratify her wishes. This will easily be seen by duly reflecting on the Gospel narrative.

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited with His disciples. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is that to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye. Now there wet set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus saith to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water

made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew, who had drawn the water; the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him: Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him" (Luke 2. 1–11).

Jesus had just commenced His public ministry and had already gathered a few disciples. He had not yet begun to preach or work miracles, and behold His Mother again appears on the scene in the Gospel, and this time as Intercessor, as Mediatress with her divine Son, of those in need, for she calls His attention to the lack of wine. But Jesus seems to repulse her, to be unwilling to accede to her wishes. But, in fact, it was no repulse or refusal on His part, for He calls her "woman," a title of honor in the language of the country, equivalent to our word "lady." Remember that now He appeared before men, not as an ordinary man, but in His official capacity, as the promised Messias, the Saviour of mankind, and therefore considered not relationship or friendship or countrymen, but only the souls of men, just as He had at the age of twelve, attended,

as He said, "to His Father's business." Hence the honorable title He gives to Mary, instead of calling her "Mother"; nevertheless, He is ready to show clearly to mankind how great Mary's influence is over Him in all that concerns His ministry, in all that concerns the salvation of men. He tells her, indeed, "My hour hath not yet come"; and this was true, for, as He had not yet begun to preach in public, it was not yet time for Him to work miracles to prove the truth of His preaching, of His mission. But then why did Jesus fulfil His Mother's wish? If it was not to prove His mission, as we have just seen, it must have been chiefly to show the great influence His Mother possessed over Him, and that she could obtain from Him all she asked, even if she asked for miracles. The sequel proves not only this, but also that Mary felt certain that He would grant all she asked. Hence she told the waiters to get their orders from Jesus; and you know the result from the Gospel narrative. God is the source of all graces, of all favors, and Mary is the ordinary channel through whom we receive them. Just as God gave us our Saviour through Mary, so also God gives us the fruits of the Saviour's Redemption through Mary. Therefore Mary's loving and tender benevolence shown at Cana towards the married couple, is continued in

heaven, where she reigns over all the saints and angels, and is honored by God far above them all, in favor of all who invoke her with confidence, and always with success. Hence let us always have recourse to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother also, in all our wants and we shall experience the effects of her love for us and of her boundless power with God.

PRAY FOR US SINNERS

We are all sinners; we have all been conceived in sin; we are naturally more inclined to evil than to good. How many sins have we not committed in thought, word, deed and omission! Every day we fall into sin more or less often. Even our holiest actions are full of imperfections, due to the want of attention or of a pure intention, performed, contaminated by carelessness, selfishness, vanity, pride, self-love. Are we not often beset with temptations and even yield to them? In fact, were it not for God's grace, there is no sin, no crime, however heinous, which we are not capable of committing. Such being our misery, our weakness, our daily, nay, hourly wants and our own helplessness, we, the adopted children of the Mother of God, should earnestly implore her help, her prayers to obtain for us the forgiveness of the sins we have committed, and the grace to keep from sin. And, if Job's prayers to God for the forgiveness of the sins of his friends were granted, how much more effective are not the prayers of Mary to her divine Son for the for-

giveness of our sins! St. Ephrem thus addresses Mary: "Hail thou, firm security of Christians! Hail thou, help of sinners! Hail thou, salvation of the world!" Her prayers for the sinners who invoke her assistance, are so powerful with God, that the Church calls her: "Mother of mercy" and *"Refuge of sinners."*

NOW

We need divine grace at every moment. And as we need it *now,* we have recourse to Mary's prayers at this moment to obtain it for us. We are liable, at every moment, to be assailed by the world, the devil and our passions, and to need the help of divine grace to conquer them; we are also in constant need of grace to practise virtue, to make progress therein, to gain merit for heaven. Therefore, it is well for us to have recourse "now" to Mary, the channel of divine grace, to pray for us that we may obtain the grace we need "now" for our salvation.

And at the Hour of Our Death

If there is a time when the help and prayers of our sweet Mother are indispensable to us, it is the terrible hour of our death, that hour on which our eternal lot depends.

It was sin that brought death into the world, for after Adam's sin God said to him: "Thou art dust, and into the dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3. 19). Such is the result of the entrance

of sin into the world, and therefore "there is no man that liveth always, or that hopeth for this" (Eccles. 9. 4). We are here on earth to know, love and serve God, and after this life to share for all eternity God's happiness in heaven. If we faithfully love and serve God on earth, after our death the everlasting happiness of heaven shall be ours. But if we neglect to learn to know God and to love and serve Him in this life, we shall after death be condemned to endless punishment and misery. Hence in this life we are traveling on the road either to an eternity of happiness or to an eternity of woe. "Every man," says Holy Scripture, "shall go into the house of *his* eternity" (Eccles. 12. 5). Death is the hour on which each man's eternity depends. If at that hour we are in the state of grace, free from grievous sin and in the friendship of God, our lot in eternity will be a happy one. But if we are then burdened with an unrepented, unforgiven grievous sin, and therefore in the enmity of God, we shall be doomed to everlasting punishment.

But although death is certain, the time of our death is unknown to us, and therefore, uncertain. It shall come when we least expect it, "and come," as St. Paul says, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5. 2). It will come suddenly

"like lightning," says our divine Saviour (Mat. 24. 27). It will come sooner than we expect. "Remember," says Holy Scripture, "that death is not slow" (Eccli. 14. 12). We should, therefore, be always prepared to meet it.

We know not where we shall die. Will death overtake us at home, in the street, at our place of work or business, among friends or among strangers, in church, on land, or on the sea? All this is unknown to us. We know not how we shall die, whether a natural or a violent death. But the most terrible uncertainty about our death is that we know not whether, when death will carry us off, we shall be in the state of grace, or in the state of sin; whether our death will be the death of the just or the death of the unrepentant sinner; we know not whether our last act will be a holy one, a prayer, or a grievous sin, whether death will overtake us in the commission of grievous sin! What a terrible uncertainty! What usually happens, is that he who leads a good, virtuous life, usually dies a holy death, and that he who leads a life of sin, usually dies in his sin! As life is, so also is death! "In whatever place the tree shall fall," says the Holy Ghost, "there shall it be" (Eccles. 11. 3). "In whatever state we shall be at the hour of death," says St. Augustine, "in that state we

shall remain forever." How terrible for the sinner! And what is still more terrible is that there can be no remedy for a bad death, for we can die but *once*. Other misfortunes may be repaired or may have some compensation, but a bad death never can, for its evil effects are eternal!

Let us bear in mind that the hour will come, and that it is not far off, when our eyes shall no longer see, our ears no longer hear, our tongue no longer speak, our hands and feet no longer move, our lungs no longer breathe, our heart no longer beat, and when our body enclosed in a coffin shall be buried and gradually corrupt and fall into dust. In the meantime our soul shall have left this world and all that was dear to us, and been judged by Jesus Christ, and sent into the house of her eternity, either to heaven to enjoy its ineffable happiness as the due reward of her good works, or to hell with its endless torments and misery as the due punishment of her unrepented sins.

Wherefore, since our eternal lot depends on the hour of our death, we need then our Mother's special and all-powerful assistance and protection to die a good death; and this is the reason why whenever we recite the Hail Mary, we conclude it by imploring her prayers for us at that all-important moment, on which our eternal sal-

vation depends. If we frequently and fervently recite this beautiful prayer, we may be sure that Mary will not let us die in the enmity of God, but will assuredly pray her divine Son to give us the grace of dying a holy death.

MARY, THE HELP OF THE DYING

(From Bronchain's Meditations)

Why should we prepare for death under Mary's protection? Because she stood at the foot of the cross, on which Jesus was dying. From that time she received the mission of assisting in their last moments the dying who implore her help. In fact, is it not reasonable, that the Mother of our divine Head and Master should assist His members and disciples also when they are dying? Should not she who became on Calvary our spiritual Mother, also bring us forth to glory on our death-bed? Since she co-operated with Jesus in opening heaven to us, is it not befitting that she should introduce us into it after our death through her prayers and the infinite merits of her divine Son? Moreover, who is better fitted than a mother to prepare her children for their last journey? And what mother can equal Mary in watchfulness, compassion and mercy? The Church deservedly calls her "Refuge of sinners." And if she delights in daily obtaining our forgiveness from God, how much

more will she not be disposed to do so, when we are about to leave this world and appear before the formidable tribunal of our Judge? Let us then daily implore her assistance for that decisive moment, and she will obtain for us perfect contrition and the grace of receiving with humble confidence the forgiveness of our sins. She will then facilitate for us the worthy reception of the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, so that we may be fore-armed against the temptations and anguish of our last moments.

How should we prepare for death with Mary's assistance? Since we may be carried off by a sudden death, without previous illness or warning, we should now, without delay, set our conscience in order and keep it in order and make every month a special preparation for death. This we should do by uniting ourselves to the Mother of God in spirit and prostrating ourselves in spirit at the feet of Jesus crucified, and cast a glance at our past life and its shortcomings, in order to excite contrition for our many sins; having done this, we should go to confession, as if it were for the last time. Then let us place ourselves under the safeguard of our Saviour and His loving Mother, and unreservedly surrender ourselves to God's infinite mercy.

And if we wish that the moment of death, so

terrifying to worldlings, should not prove too painful to us, let us now already do with merit what we shall have to do either willingly or unwillingly when death actually comes to us, that is, let us now already detach ourselves from every creature, and from this very day quit with mind and heart all that death will one day ravish from us. How bitter is it not to be torn away from this world in which all one's affections are centered! On the other hand, how sweet will it be for us to leave this world, if, under Mary's protection, we have already been detached from it during life!

Let us constantly, with Mary's assistance, so live, that our last moment may be the happiest of our mortal life. "Precious in the sight of God," says Holy Scripture, "is the death of His saints" (Ps. 115. 15). Why? Because they are *saints.* We should, therefore, strive with all our might every day to become holy, and even at every moment of the day, for when death shall knock at our door, it will be too late to begin that arduous work. Our sanctification requires us to avoid carefully every wilful fault, punctually and faithfully to perform every duty and obligation of our state of life. This, however, is the task, the work of a life-time, and not an affair to be deferred to and attended to at our last mo-

ments, for our divine Saviour tells us: "Be ye ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come" (Mat. 24. 44). Blessed is he who will then be well prepared. Wherefore, it behooves us to be always engaged in overcoming our evil inclinations and passions, and all temptations, in avoiding whatever is sinful and dangerous, in a word, in leading a true Christian life; and to do all this with the help of our Mother Mary added to our earnest efforts, will be comparatively easy, and will enable us to die a good and holy death. Will not such a death be the harbinger of an eternity of bliss? Is not the happiness of a peaceful death with the sure hope of an endless reward worth all the restraints and sacrifices requisite to give up sin and renounce the dangerous pleasures of the world? And, moreover, let us not forget that such a life, however austere in appearance, has its sweetness, joys, peace and satisfaction not to be found in the goods and pleasures of the world. For the faithful servants of Jesus, and of herself, our loving Mother Mary knows how to change all bitterness into sweetness, especially at the hour of death.

AMEN

This word means "let it be so," and is a reaffirmation and a brief repetition of all that precedes it, namely, of the salutation and praises of Mary, and of the invocation addressed to her of praying for us now and at the hour of our death.

Let us conclude this explanation of the Hail Mary with the words of St. Augustine: "When I shall have said all I can of thee, O Mary, my praise will fall far short of thy deserts."

THE DIVINE MATERNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

(From the larger Church History of Darras)

The majesty of the Divine Council in which the Incarnation of the Son of God was resolved upon, called forth, as a touching corollary, the virginal council held here below in the heart of Mary, with an angel as confidant. Gabriel's salutation, *Ave, gratia plena,* "Hail, full of grace," is, in fact, addressed to a *sovereign;* there can be no mistake in saying this. Never before in the angelic manifestations recorded in the Old Testament had the language of the heavenly messengers been clothed in so reverential a form. Here God's messenger, the angel Gabriel, is the first to bow before the Virgin of Nazareth; he "salutes" her. In their apparition as the messengers of the Most High the angels brought grace to mortals; here Gabriel finds grace in its fulness; and, as in heaven, he had prostrated himself before the majesty of the Almighty conferring a mission upon him, so now at Nazareth he bows before a Virgin who had already become

the Tabernacle in which God dwelt. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." Is human language adequate to express this ineffable mystery? The angel, come down from the eternal spheres, has just left the divine throne dazzling in glory, and at Nazareth he finds the divine throne in an humble virgin(ity). Jehova in heaven; the Lord in Mary; such are the two terms of the august ambassador's mission. He then salutes "the woman blessed among all others." After the greeting (*Ave*) of the angelic choirs, addressed to the Queen of angels, comes the salutation of mankind; the acclamations of the just, of the patriarchs, of the prophets, resuming all the hopes of the world and concentrating them around the "blessed woman," who is to efface the curse of the first woman. After forty centuries of expectation, of longing, prayers and tears, the angels and men are prostrated with Gabriel before the Virgin of Nazareth. Is this enough of grandeur, of glory and majesty on the forehead of the daughter of David? No! The Divine Trinity Itself transmits to Mary a salutation grander and more sublime than can ever be conceived. The Most High wishes to descend into Mary; the Holy Ghost wishes to overshadow her; the Son of God wishes to be born of her and to call her His Mother! The angel re-

veals to the Virgin the resolution of the Eternal Council, and awaits her answer, as if submitting to Mary's council the wishes of the Blessed Trinity. Mary recollected, in the silence of her humility, in the ardor of her devotion, in the contemplation of the divine love wishing to associate to itself her virginal love in the salvation of the world, Mary is silent, and the angel waits. Finally, a word of acquiescence falls from her lips: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." The virginal council has ratified the decree of the Eternal Council; the angel disappears to bring to the Divine Throne that word which shakes the heavens, saves the earth, and wrests the scepter of souls from the infernal powers. Overwhelmed by the contemplation of these wonders, man falls on his knees, weeps, prays, adores the Eternal Mercy, which has created prodigies of salvation to fill up the abyss of our miseries. Do not recall to me the names of those unfortunate, misguided men who have dared to outrage that virginal name by which their mothers, their wives, their sisters have been rehabilitated. The blessings received by mankind prostrate for nineteen centuries at the feet of the Virgin of Nazareth, of the Queen of angels, of the Mother of God, become also the Mother of men; the miracles of

grace, of consolation, of hope and salvation, poured out most abundantly by the supplicating omnipotence of Mary; the rays of her virginal splendor shining since then on the foreheads of Eve's daughters and causing to blossom on the earth marvels of sanctity, grace and charity; such are the voices, such the cortège, which we wish to hear and evoke around the solitude of Nazareth where the angel left Mary!

The human race will repeat to the end of ages Gabriel's *Ave,* and the more men will meditate thereon, the more they shall find fresh charms therein. How then can men calling themselves Christians and accustomed to look upon the Gospel as the infallible Word of God, how can they rob themselves of the honor of repeating in Mary's honor the salutation addressed to her over nineteen hundred years ago by the messenger of God Himself? Protestantism charges us with idolatry for doing this. But the Catholic Church does not adore Mary, or give her divine honors. She honors Mary as the creature "full of grace, blessed among all women, of whom was born the Son of the Most High." If this is idolatry, we have been taught it by the very messenger of God Himself, the angel Gabriel, and we read those very words in the beginning of the Gospel. In the stand taken by Protestantism

of keeping silence concerning the glorious privileges of the Virgin of Nazareth, there is a dark narrow-mindedness astounding to faith and disconcerting to reason itself. No one can deny that, in the immense social transformations directly brought about by the light of the Gospel, woman's rehabilitation is one of the grandest and most striking. To ignore this would be to suppress history. But this grand fact becomes unintelligible without the action and the powerful and dominating influence of the honor paid to Mary as the Mother of God. In the chain of events constituting human history all things hold together, are indissolubly linked with one another. The abasement of woman in ancient society and among all nations, foreign to the revelation of the Incarnate Word, is not an insignificant, arbitrary or inconsiderate phenomenon. It is a stubborn fact constant, uniform, positively legislated on by lawgivers, the cause of which, deeply engraved in the conscience of the human race, goes back to the divine condemnation after the fall. Outside of the sentence passed in the garden of Eden on guilty woman, this strange fact has no other explanation possible. The sensualism of the pagan world, far from re-acting in woman's favor, only aggravated her opprobrium. Find, if you can,

a philosophical reason for that persistent inferiority during the four thousand years preceding Mary. Explain, if you can, why polytheism, whilst worshiping Venus in temples, held woman, the wife, the sister, the mother of family, as something more vile than a slave. And, nevertheless, the world was then expecting a virgin who was to open to earth the closed gate of heaven. Parallel with this system of inexorable and uninterrupted abasement for forty centuries by one-half of mankind against the other half, there existed those impure sanctuaries where man's depravity actually worshiped itself and pretended to raise woman's shame to heaven; and entirely opposed to that unrestrained current of brutality and ignominious apotheoses there was developed among all nations an uninterrupted tradition of salvation through woman! The Roman expected the Virgin that would bring the keys of the golden age. The Indian theophanies offered the same hope. The sacred books of the Brahmins declare that when a god deigns to visit the earth, he mysteriously assumes flesh in a virgin's womb. China had her virginal flower, Lien-Ouha, like the Egyptian Lotus, which, under the breath of God, fecundated Isis. The Druids expected a Virgin-Mother. All these scattered traits of a primitive belief, which goes back to

Eden, are concentrated in the revelation made to the Jews, around the Lily of Israel, the offspring of Jesse, which was to produce the heavenly Flower. A Virgin "shall crush the serpent's head." "A Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son who shall be God with us."

By what right, then, do men calling themselves Christians, dare to overthrow the history of the ancient world, trample under foot the evidence of cotemporary facts, and to deny the conformity of the universal tradition with the Gospel-teaching concerning the influence of the Virgin-Mother? The only thing novel, unusual and inadmissible in this is the pretension of upsetting the whole past, of making the present an inexplicable enigma and of substituting senseless and absurd assertions for the clear and visible manifestation of centuries. How well we may say to these men, so unchristian in spirit: "The Virgin-Mother was honored by a worship of hope for four thousand years before her coming, and you would wish that the Virgin of Nazareth, called Mary, whose Son Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, redeemed mankind, should remain forgotten, unhonored, unworshiped by the generations that owe her their Redeemer, their salvation!" This is not so; this cannot be. She herself, the humble "handmaid of the

Lord," declares that "all generations shall call her blessed." Let our stray brethren of the icy regions of Protestantism deign to lay aside all bias, and ask themselves what they are doing to extol and glorify the Blessed Virgin and fulfil her inspired prophecy. Where are the testimonies of veneration, of respect, of gratitude and love with which they surround her memory? Were the whole world ignorant of Mary's name, is it Protestantism that would dispel this ignorance, glorify that name and place it on everybody's lips as the synonym of happiness? Nevertheless, the prophetic saying of Mary, "All generations shall call me blessed," is one of the Gospel sayings which Protestants, as well as Catholics, read in the Sacred Text. Why does this saying remain barren and without application or fulfilment in the bosom of the so-called Reformation? Truth has no such contradictions, no such inconsistencies, no such systematic antipathy. The Catholic Church in this, as in everything else, keeps inviolably the *whole Depositum* of the Word of God, and maintains it in undying fruitfulness. The Immaculate Virgin has altars all over the earth; there is not a place or a time when her oracle is not literally fulfilled: "All generations shall call me blessed." Outside of the Gospel narrative,

which is so explicit concerning Mary's grandeurs, the Church has preserved some traditional details of her history. And could it be otherwise? The apostles had personally known Mary; some of them were her kinsmen; all were her countrymen. In the Supper-Room, where the Holy Ghost descended in the form of fiery tongues on its inmates, Mary was with the Twelve, persevering with them in prayer and in the "breaking of bread." John, the beloved disciple, had, at the foot of the cross, received the divine legacy of Jesus confiding His Mother to him. These are authentic, undeniable facts, narrated in the Gospel. Now, can it be imagined, that Mary's relatives, that the apostles, who all suffered persecution or death for the name of Jesus, should have been ignorant of His Mother's origin or history? Alexander's courtiers knew the history of Olympias, his mother; and the apostles should be ignorant of the history of the Mother of Jesus! Should they have lived with her and, as it were, under her maternal direction after their Master's glorious Ascension, without gathering some information from her lips, without questioning her concerning what was dearer to them than their own life? The very assertion of such a thing unquestionably proves its falsehood. The Catholic Church, the heiress of the apostles, has

surely received a summary of traditions concerning the Immaculate Virgin. The very word *tradition* startles Protestantism; we are not ignorant of this. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church was founded not on the Written Word, but on the doctrines of Jesus Christ transmitted by *oral* preaching, so that Christians, unlike the Jews, are not the children of a book, but children of the word preached and "handed down," the children of the ever-living Word.

MARY, EVER A VIRGIN, HAD NO CHILDREN BESIDES JESUS

(From the larger Church History of Darras)

Joseph and Mary had taken refuge in Egypt to withdraw the Child Jesus from Herod's persecution. They must have remained there a long time. St. Epiphanius says that their exile lasted two years. Had they other children in the meantime? No; for, as the Gospel testifies, when the heavenly messenger announced to Joseph the death of the tyrant, the Holy Family had not increased; its members were the very same as when they departed for Egypt. The words of the angel bidding them to return to the land of Israel, were entirely similar to those he had used to order their flight into Egypt. "Arise, take the Child and His Mother, and return to the land of Israel. And Joseph arose and, taking the Child and His Mother, returned to the land of Israel." There is evidently no indication of any other child than Jesus, nor any room for such a surmise. After the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth eight years more or less passed away

until the episode of the journey to Jerusalem at the feast of Easter. If in the meanwhile brothers and sisters had been born to Jesus, there should be some trace of this in the Gospel. The very nature of the incident related so circumstantially by the evangelist, is of great help in solving this question. "The Child waxed strong in the plenitude of wisdom and the grace of God was in Him." Thus does St. Luke begin his narrative; he makes no mention of younger brothers or sisters over whom the Divine Child would exercise His charms. Jesus is in the foreground; Mary and Joseph concentrate all their solicitude, their adoration, their love in this Treasure of blessings and graces; the earthly trinity of Bethlehem, from their exile in Egypt, and from their return into their own country, such is the Gospel description of the Holy Family preparing to leave Nazareth in order to celebrate the paschal solemnity in the Holy City. The journey thither has no unusual incident. From the year when the paschal feast had been desecrated by the murder of the three thousand victims of Archelaus, Joseph and Mary had conformed to the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. Probably Jesus had previously accompanied them. Had Mary had other children, requiring her maternal care, she could not have made that

pious pilgrimage. A numerous family of children, as supposed by Protestants and infidels, would have been a permanent obstacle. The evangelist attests that "*every year*" (Luke 2. 41) the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Pasch. "Every year" applied to an interval of eight years, more or less, shows clearly that Mary had no other children during that time. Moreover, the Child Jesus, when twelve years old, remained in Jerusalem after the paschal solemnity, when His parents set out on their return to Nazareth. This separation took place without causing the least uneasiness to Joseph and Mary, for the groups of pilgrims returned home in two bands, one of the men, and the other of the women, and were preceded by the children singing the psalms of David. The first day Joseph and Mary proceeded on their way in perfect security. Each of them believed Jesus was in the other band, "in the company." But if Jesus had had brothers and sisters, Mary would have thought that He was with them. But when at the hour of camping for the night, Mary and Joseph, not seeing Jesus, inquired about Him, not from His brothers and sisters, as they would have naturally done, if He had any brothers or sisters, but "from their relatives and acquaintances." If

Mary had had younger children, she would surely have asked them: "Where is your brother? Where did you leave Him? When did you last see Him?" Such are the questions every mother would ask in a similar case. But Mary did not do this, for the simple reason that Jesus had neither brothers nor sisters. If He had, then, either the supposed brothers and sisters of Jesus were taken along, or had been left at Nazareth. In either supposition the conduct of Mary and Joseph would have been inexplicable. Had the children been left at Nazareth, who would have taken care of them in their humble home? Moreover, had they been left at Nazareth, the heart of their parents would have longed to see them soon again; hence the loss of Jesus would have temporarily separated the married couple; one of them would return to Jerusalem to seek the eldest, and the other, full of anxiety for the safety of the others would hasten home to them. But what is the conduct of Mary and Joseph according to the Gospel? At the end of the first day's journey homeward, Jesus is not to be seen, and Mary and Joseph act as if they had lost their all. No other affection draws them elsewhere; without commending to friends or relatives their supposed children, without either taking them along, if these were with them, both

Mary and Joseph at once return to Jerusalem. In that city they continue their search and, at last, find Jesus in the vestibule of the temple seated among the disciples of the doctors, questioning the latter and answering their questions with a prudence and a wisdom astonishing all present. But Joseph and Mary are alone; they have no other children with them. The disconsolate Mother does not say to Jesus, "Your father, your brothers, sisters and I have sought Thee sorrowing"; for Jesus had no brothers and sisters. Mary in finding Jesus, her only Son, her first born, finds her all. After their return to Nazareth, Jesus is there alone "subject to His parents"; He alone fills the heart of Mary, who preserves all His words in a heavenly meditation. Alone, as her Son, Jesus is by the side of His Mother at the wedding at Cana. Mary, in her turn was alone at the foot of the cross on which Jesus expired. There is no other child to console the Mother of sorrows. If Mary had had other children, sons and daughters, would Jesus, indicating St. John, have said to her: "Behold thy son," and to St. John, designating Mary: "Behold thy Mother?" The Gospel always calls Mary "the Mother of Jesus," but calls Salome "the mother of James and John." Mary's title is "the Mother of Jesus," because

she is the Mother of her only and "first born" Son Jesus; you may a thousand times peruse every page of the Gospel, but you can never find therein the slightest trace of any child born of Mary, the Virgin, besides the Divine Child of Bethlehem.

But do not the evangelists relate that the multitudes, astonished at the miracles and doctrines of Jesus, exclaimed: "Is He not the carpenter's Son? Is not His Mother called Mary? Is He not the brother of James, Joseph, Jude, and Simon?" (Mark 6. 3; Mat. 13. 55, 56). On another occasion, whilst Jesus Christ was teaching the people in a house at Capharnaum, some persons said to Him: "Thy Mother and Thy brethren are outside seeking Thee." But He, answering them said: "And who is My Mother, and who are My brethren? And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: 'Behold My mother and My brethren; for whoever doth the will of My Father, who is in heaven, the same is My brother, My sister, My mother'" (Mat. 12. 47–50). St. John (7. 5) adds: "Neither did His brethren believe in Him." These texts prove nothing against Mary's perpetual virginity, as even Calvin admits, saying: "The Hebrews were wont to call all relatives brethren or brothers. Wherefore Helvidius

showed his ignorance when he asserted that Mary had several sons, because in some places the Gospel makes mention of the brethren of Christ." (Comment. on the Harmony of the Gospel.) And Grotius, a learned Protestant, says: "Those whom the Gospel calls brethren of Jesus Christ, were only His cousins, for such was the manner of speaking even among the Greeks and Romans." The Gospel tells us that, "Mary, the mother of James and Joseph and wife of Cleophas, was the sister of the Mother of Jesus" (John 19. 25). (See also Mat. 27. 56.) St. Jude calls himself the "brother of James" (Jude 1); hence his mother was Mary, the wife of Cleophas. As to Simon, the historian Eusebius relates that he succeeded his brother James (the Lesser) as bishop of Jerusalem; he was, therefore, only a cousin of Jesus. Eusebius proves this by the testimony of Hegesippus, a Jewish convert, and the first historian of the Church, who was himself a cotemporary of St. Simon.

Among the Hebrews the word brother, *Akh,* had two meanings: the one, a general meaning, was equivalent to "near relative," such as cousin, uncle, nephew, etc. Thus Lot, the nephew of Abraham, is called his "brother" (Gen. 14. 14–16), and Laban, Jacob's uncle, calls Jacob his

"brother" (Gen. 31. 15), and Tobias, a distant cousin of Sara, calls her his "sister" (Tob. 8. 9). The other meaning was more restricted, and was identical with our term "brother."

Therefore there is *no trace* in the Gospel that Mary ever had any children besides Jesus Christ.

WHO WAS THE FIRST TO HONOR THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY?

(From Rohrbacher's Church History)

Protestants are scandalized at the honor we Catholics pay to the Blessed Virgin Mary. But who is it that first gave us the example of honoring her. Was it perhaps a simple-minded woman, who, carried away by her very simplicity, first thought of imploring the Mother of Jesus, in the sweet illusion that Mary, being herself a mother, would sympathize with her in her maternal affliction? Was it perhaps a man struggling with death who first called upon the Mother of sorrows to assist him in the agony of death? No, it was a far greater and far more wonderful person. Was it perhaps a Father of the Church, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, a divinely inspired Prophet? It was one far greater. It was, not a weak mortal, not an inhabitant of this land of exile, but a denizen of heaven; one greater than any Father of the Church, than any of Christ's Apostles, than any inspired Prophet; it was one of those pure spirits who continually

behold God face to face, one of those heavenly spirits, who standing night and day before the throne of the thrice Holy God and sing, without ceasing, His everlasting praises. It was an angel of the Most High, an angel, not of the lower choirs, but one of the chiefs of the heavenly host, one of the princes of the court of the King of kings, who some centuries previous had announced to Daniel the end of evils and the Saviour of mankind; it was, in a word, the Angel Gabriel.

And in what circumstance did this prince of the Lord's hosts first present his homage to the Blessed Virgin? Was it on the day of her glorious assumption, when she triumphantly entered heaven, when its gates were opened to receive her as the Queen of angels and men? No. It was when she lived in obscurity, unknown to the world, ignorant of her destiny and hidden in the house of her humble parents. There, in her poor home, the powerful archangel came from the highest heaven to honor the first of all that modest and timid virgin, to be the first to celebrate her praise, the first to address her with this respectful greeting: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."

But did this blessed archangel meet Mary by chance, or, did he come to her in his own name?

"He was sent by God," the Gospel declares. He came as the ambassador of the Most High, in the name of all the angels and archangels, of all the thrones and the dominations, of all the principalities and the powers, of all the cherubim and the seraphim. What do I say? He came to greet Mary in the name of the most holy and adorable Trinity. It was, then, in the name of God in three Persons, and of all the denizens of heaven that he greeted so respectfully and reverentially that Virgin of Israel, that Daughter of Adam. Therefore, it was God Himself, with His angels, who first gave us the example of honoring the humblest and purest of virgins.

And for what object was this messenger of the Almighty sent to that humble daughter of Nazareth? "Ye heavens and earth, be astonished at this!" (Jer. 2. 12). The Almighty sent His angel to treat with her concerning the accomplishment of His eternal design, by which He would repair the past, the present and the future, astonish the angels, men and demons, console the earth, re-open heaven to fallen mankind and confound hell. To treat with her about the fulfilment of His merciful promise, the only hope of Adam and Eve in their fall, the sole object of all the desires of the patriarchs and of all the predictions of the prophets, the general expectation

of all nations, the joy of heaven and the terror of the devils; to treat with her about the Incarnation of His divine Son and the Redemption of mankind. To treat with her, I say, in order to obtain her consent. In fact, as we read in the Gospel, when the heavenly ambassador made known to Mary the object of his mission, and said to her that she was to conceive in her chaste womb the Saviour of the world, she hesitated, deliberated, and objected as an obstacle the virginity she had promised to God. And the angel had to assure her in the name of God that, by a unique miracle of His omnipotence, she would become a mother without ceasing to be a virgin. It was then, and then only that she consented to accept the incomparable honor of the Divine Maternity; and it was only after her consent that the Incarnation of Word was effected and the grand work of the Redemption of man was begun.

This being the case, who will now dare to charge us with honoring the Blessed Virgin too much? Who honors her the most, God, or we Catholics? God the Father possesses an incommunicable prerogative of begetting His Son from all eternity; nevertheless He now communicates it to Mary, whom He had chosen to give temporal birth to the Son of God. The Son of God is truly Mary's Son, and Mary is truly the Mother of the

Son of God. To perform such a prodigy, the Holy Ghost descends in her and inundates her with all His graces, and she becomes His Spouse. Thus does God honor her. And we, what do we do to honor her? What do all our praises of her, all our hymns, all our feasts in her honor amount to? All we do and can do to honor her is but an imperfect representation and imitation of the incomprehensible honor that God has shown and still shows her, and a means of rejoicing with her and thanking God for the incomparable honor God Himself has bestowed upon her.

Protestants charge us Catholics with excessive confidence and love towards the Blessed Virgin Mary. But how much confidence and love did not the Son of God testify to her? By what name did He call her? Was it not a name full of confidence, love, respect and submission, the sweet name of mother? Was He not, during the thirty years of His hidden life, subject and obedient to her as the most loving and affectionate of sons?

How can any one find fault with us for imploring her help in the work of our salvation? But did not God Himself give us the example in this? When He wished to redeem all mankind, did He not Himself solicit, so to speak, the consent of the Virgin of Nazareth? And if He, the

Almighty, gave her so great and important a share in the very work of the Redemption when she was still groaning with us in this valley of tears, how great a share will He not give her in the *results* of this grandest of divine works, now that she is reigning in heaven near her divine Son, and is seated on a throne of grace and mercy? If heaven was awaiting the consent of her humility, with how great a confidence may not the earth hope in the powerful intercession of her charity?

But how will Mary know our prayers? Just as she then knew the will of God; through an angel. For has not the same God given His angels charge over us in all our ways, commanding them even, if necessary, to bear us up in their hands, lest we hurt our foot against a stone? And how much more eagerly will they not hasten to bring our prayers to their Queen and ours, in order that she may join her prayers to ours and enable us to obtain from her adorable Son the favor of forever beholding Him face to face together with her and them?

Whoever candidly, with faith and love, meditates on what the Gospel tells us of the Blessed Virgin, will no longer be astonished at our devotion to her, or at the joy and piety with which we celebrate all the events of her life; or at our

firm belief in her Immaculate Conception, that is, in her having been preserved, in view of her Divine Maternity, through the merits of her Divine Son, from contracting the stain of original sin, and thus fulfilling the prophecy God had addressed to the serpent: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head" (Gen. 3. 15). The woman foretold is Mary, and her seed is Jesus, the Son of Mary. The enmity, the opposition of the Mother and the Son towards the serpent is identical, and has always existed; in the Son it proceeds from His divine nature; in His Mother it proceeds from the grace imparted to her from the very first moment of her existence, or conception.

Let us now see what admirable effects the mere voice of Mary can produce in hearts. After conceiving of the Holy Ghost the Son of God in her chaste womb, "Mary went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost; and she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is

this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord" (Luke 1. 39–45).

After the angel Gabriel, the messenger of God, St. Elizabeth, or rather the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, who inspired her, teaches us to praise and bless Mary. And the effects Mary herself produces, sound her praises still more. At the very sound of Mary's greeting to Elizabeth, John is sanctified, and leaps for joy in his mother's womb; at the very sound of Mary's voice Elizabeth herself is filled with the Holy Ghost and recognizes and acknowledges Mary as the Mother of her Lord. It is, indeed, Jesus in Mary's chaste womb, who works all these wonders, but He works them through the sound of Mary's voice, that is, through Mary. Let us then unite ourselves to the angel and Elizabeth, and say with them: "Hail, full of grace, who fillest from thy fulness those who have the happiness to hear thee. Thou art blessed above all women, cherished above all mothers, exalted above all queens and creatures. And blessed, praised, loved and adored forever be the fruit of thy

womb, Jesus, thy God and ours, thy Saviour and ours, thy Love and ours! O Mary, our Mother, may the sweet sound of thy greeting and peace often resound in our heart, so that we also may be sanctified and be filled with a holy joy and become worthy dwellings of the Holy Ghost!"

Let us here learn to know and imitate Mary. She had heard the archangel saying to her: "The Holy that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." Her only answer was: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." The Holy Ghost revealed to St. Elizabeth Mary's incomprehensible glory, and Elizabeth admires Mary's incomparable dignity, exclaiming: "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me," that is, honor me with her visit. She extols the miracle produced by the sound of Mary's voice: "For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears the infant in my womb leaped for joy." Then she congratulates Mary on her lively faith: "And blessed art thou that hast (so promptly) believed; because those (wonderful) things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." Such are the grand and magnificent praises, real praises inspired by the Holy Ghost Himself. But Mary keeps none of them for herself; her

pious humility refers them all to God, whose infinite mercies she celebrates. "You," she says, "glorify the Mother of the Lord, but my soul glorifies the Lord only. You say that your infant leaped for joy; but my spirit has exulted with great joy but in God, my Saviour, my Jesus. You call me blessed for having believed, but my faith, my happiness are only an effect of the mercy of the Lord, who has favorably regarded the lowliness of His handmaid. And this is why all generations shall call me blessed. It is the Mighty One who has done these great things to me, for He is Holiness itself. His mercy does not end with me, but extends from generation to generation over all who fear Him. He will again do as He has done, display the power of His arm, disperse the haughty, depose the great, and exalt the humble; He will satiate the hungry and send away the rich in want; He will favorably receive His servant Israel, mindful of His mercy of old and of His promises to Abraham and his posterity, promises which shall subsist forever."

In this manner, Mary, praised by angels and saints, refers all these praises to God. The more she is praised, the more also does she praise God. Wherefore let us not fear praising and blessing her with all generations, for we thereby bless and praise God in her and through her.

SELECTIONS FROM BOSSUET'S SERMONS ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

I. The Immaculate Conception

Mary's glorious Maternity, her alliance with God from all eternity, places her in a special rank which excludes all comparison with any other rank or class of creatures. She is the Mother of God, the Virgin-Mother; she is "full of grace"; hers is the deepest humility, the most perfect virtue; she is *sinless*. Jesus, her divine Son, is sinless by nature; Mary, His Mother, is sinless through grace, redeemed, indeed, by her divine Son, the Saviour of mankind, but not like all the other children of Adam *after* contracting the stain of sin, but by being *preserved* from contracting it. Should not the Mother of God surpass in holiness and divine gifts all other creatures? The angels, Adam and Eve were created in justice and holiness; Jeremias and St. John Baptist were sanctified before their birth. The Son of God came on earth to atone for, "to take away sin" (Is. 27. 9; John 1. 29), to overcome

Satan, and therefore it behooved that He should not in the least be connected with sin, with anything sinful. Wherefore He could not have suffered Satan to possess the soul of His Mother for even one instant. As Son of Mary, Jesus was bound to honor Mary and protect her from all evil, from all sin, the only real evil. And there can be no doubt that He, our Model in all things, most perfectly honored her and protected her from all evil, from all stain of sin, and thus prevented her from becoming to Him, even for an instant, an object of aversion, horror and hatred. Not only from the very first moment of her life, but from all eternity, He destined her to be His Mother, and considered her in that light, for with God there is neither past nor future, but everything is always present to Him. Consequently, it behooves Him, the best and most dutiful of sons, to lavish upon Mary all the favors, prerogatives and gifts that were befitting and necessary to make her, from the very first moment of her existence, truly worthy of becoming His Mother and deserving of all the affection, respect and love of such a Son. Therefore both the honor and glory of God required Mary's Immaculate Conception and her freedom from even the slightest stain of actual sin.

II. The Annunciation

Eminent and sublime, indeed, is the vocation of Mary, for God, before all ages, predestined her to give birth to Jesus Christ, His divine Son, and thus to enable Him to become the Saviour of men. God did not wish that the Mother of His Son should be the mere channel of such a grace, but that she should be a *free* instrument thereof and, therefore, actually contribute to this grandest of the divine works, not only by her excellent disposition, but also by an act of her free-will. It was for this object that the Eternal Father sent an angel to propose to Mary the sublime mystery of the Incarnation. And this mystery remained, as it were, in abeyance so long as Mary had not given her consent. Thus the grand work of the Incarnation of the Son of God, whom mankind had expected and longed for during forty centuries, is still in suspense when God Himself is resolved to execute it, and remains in suspense until the humble Virgin has signified her consent, a consent that was necessary for man's salvation, for her co-operation was required for its accomplishment. As soon as she had given her consent, heaven was opened, and the Son of God became man, and mankind had a Saviour.

Mary gave her consent out of charity, that is,

out of her love of God and her love of her fellow-men and their salvation. Mary's charity, in some manner, is the fertile source whence divine grace began to flow and spread over all mankind. And, as St. Ambrose and St. Thomas declare, "it was from her blessed womb that the spirit of holy fervor, which first filled her, has filled the whole world" (Wisd. 1. 7). "Mary," adds St. Thomas, "received such a fulness of grace, that she thereby acquired a very intimate union with the Author of grace and deserved to receive within herself Him who possesses all graces. By giving birth to Him, she, in some manner, caused grace to flow over all mankind. Hence Mary, by her charity, concurred in giving to all men their Saviour." From this it follows that God, having decreed to give us, through the Blessed Virgin, our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Author and Source of grace, willed, at the same time, that we should receive through her also the fruits of the Redemption, for God's decrees and orders admit of no change, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "the gifts of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11. 29). It is and always shall be true, that, because we have once received through Mary the universal principle of grace, that is, the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, we are to receive through her also the di-

verse applications of grace in all the different conditions of the Christian life. And since her maternal charity so greatly contributed to man's salvation in the mystery of the Incarnation, which is the principle of grace, Mary shall forever contribute to man's salvation in all the operations dependent on the Incarnation.

III. The Immaculate Conception

God apparently shows greater love for sinners than for the just. The parable of the lost sheep, for instance, leads to such a supposition. Repentant sinners, the Gospel seems to imply, were dearer to our divine Saviour than the persons who had always been good and just. Jesus expressly declared that He had come on earth to call sinners to repentance, and not to call the just. Repentant sinners were the fruit of His ministry, of His preaching, hardships, persecutions, sufferings and death. But the fact is that God has greater love for those who have always been good and pure, but it is *as God* that He loves them more. The innocent, the pure, can and do approach nearer to the thrice Holy God. But *as Saviour of mankind,* Jesus seeks the lost sheep. Since God has a special love for innocence, sinlessness, how can we imagine that, when He came

on earth, He had not the consolation of finding one sinless soul! And if He found *one, that one* was surely no other than *His own worthy Mother!*

Jesus Christ chose Peter, John, Paul, Apollo *for His Church.* "All things are *yours,* whether it be Paul, or Apollo, or Cephas . . . for *all are yours*" (1 Cor. 3. 22). But *for Himself, for His own Mother, He surely chose the very best, the most worthy, pure and perfect of mankind, and that was the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate, the sinless and spotless Virgin!* Mary is God's "unique." He rescued "*His Only One* from the lion" (devil) Ps. 34. 17. And Jesus is Mary's "unique," for she can say: "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Cant. 2. 16). In Mary there never was the slightest obscurity, darkness or spot, that is, anything sinful. "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is not a spot in thee" (Cant. 4. 7). Mary is the dawn and Jesus Christ is the day. There is no darkness in the day, for it is all light. The difference between the dawn and the day consists only in degree, for the dawn is the beginning of the day, and introduces the day. Jesus is the day, Holiness itself; but to be His dawn, Mary must be spotless herself, and must have been sinless from the very first moment of her existence. Therefore our divine Saviour can

truly say to her: "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is not a spot in thee."

IV. Why God Chose Mary to Be the Mother of the Saviour

There is no alliance or union with God like that of Mary. She is the Saviour's only human parent. In this Mary differs from all other mothers. She conceived Him first spiritually in her soul before conceiving Him corporally in her body. In Holy Communion Jesus Christ unites Himself to our body, in order to reach our soul. In creating His Mother, He intended to create one worthy of Himself, perfectly pleasing to Himself. The Son of God did not intend His Mother to be a mere instrument in the Incarnation, but to be His *co-operatress* in the Redemption of mankind; otherwise He would not have sought her consent to become His Mother. As the eternal Father "*so* loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son" for its Redemption, so also Mary *so* loved mankind as to desire most earnestly their salvation; and this was the reason why the Eternal Father chose her, that out of her charity she should give a Saviour to mankind. This divine choice, or decree, undergoes no change, for God is immutable. Just as her maternal charity

in our regard greatly contributed to our salvation in the mystery of the Incarnation, which is the universal principle of grace, so her maternal charity will forever contribute to man's salvation in all the other operations of salvation dependent on that mystery; in other words, Mary's charity will contribute in applying to men individually and collectively the fruits of salvation resulting from the Incarnation. The grace of Jesus Christ operates in three ways: it *calls, justifies, gives perseverance;* and Mary's charity co-operates in each of these ways; for instance, John Baptist was sanctified before his birth by the presence of Jesus, but it was at the sound of Mary's voice (Luke 1. 44); Jesus Christ performed His first miracle at the wedding at Cana, but He did so through Mary's influence, "and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2. 11); St. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, persevered faithfully even to the cross of Jesus, and was given to Mary as her son; Mary is thus the Mother of perseverance. Her affection for us, her maternal heart prays for us, obtains for us the graces we need, and secures the perseverance of her loving clients and children.

V. Mary and Eve

The work of our corruption commenced with Eve; that of our reparation began through Mary. The word of death is addressed to Eve; and the word of life, to Mary. Eve, still a virgin, ate the forbidden fruit and brought death into the world; Mary, ever a virgin, brought the fruit-giving life to mankind. The curse came to mankind through Eve, and blessing comes to us through Mary. An angel of darkness speaks to Eve, and deceives her; an angel of light speaks to Mary, and enlightens her. Satan induces in Eve a longing for apparent, but false greatness, and the desire to be like God; the good angel allays Mary's fears and reminds her that nothing is impossible to God. Eve's credulity led her into sin; and Mary, giving credit to the good angel, gave us the means of blotting out the guilt of Eve's sin. Eve, seduced by the wiles of Satan, flees from God's presence; Mary, instructed by the angel, became worthy to bear God. Eve gave us the fruit of death; and Mary gives us the fruit of life, and, says St. Ignatius Martyr, "became the advocate of the virgin Eve." Eve is the mother of all mortals, the dead, according to grace; and Mary is the Mother of all the living, according to grace.

VI. The Visitation

St. Elizabeth was filled with humble astonishment at Mary's visit and salutation. She does not say: "Whence comes it that my Lord comes to me," but "whence comes it that the *Mother of my Lord* cometh to me?" She thus expresses her inferiority to Mary and openly proclaims her "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God." Mary seeks Elizabeth, Jesus seeks John Baptist, in order to sanctify him and render him fit to be His precursor; but Jesus effects this through Mary, since it was done "at the sound of Mary's voice." We should admire, in a special manner, the humility of Jesus and Mary in this mystery. Humility is necessary to all as the condition to please God. The centurion, whose servant was sick, said to Jesus who was going to his house to cure his servant: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof" (Luke 7. 6); and deserved the cure of his servant. St. Peter, after his miraculous draught of fishes, humbled himself, saying: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5. 8); and deserved to hear that Jesus would make him "a fisher of men," that is, an apostle. St. Paul, who had labored more and suffered more hardships than the other apostles, humbly called himself

"the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15. 9) "and unworthy to be called an apostle." The great precursor of Jesus, St. John Baptist, called himself only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1. 23), the "friend of the Bridegroom," as "unworthy to loosen the Saviour's shoes."

At the sound of Mary's voice the infant John leaped for joy in his mother's womb (Luke 1. 41), because of the presence of Him, whose precursor he was destined to be. St. John "was not the Light," but only he "who was to give testimony concerning the Light of the world" (John 1. 7), the Son of Mary. But "men loved darkness more than the light" (John 3. 19). But "he that doeth evil, hateth the light" (v. 20). The wicked care not for heaven, for they are "resolved to turn their eyes down to the earth" (Ps. 16. 2). But as for us: "The Lord is my light and salvation" (Ps. 26. 1). Let us, therefore, believe and turn our eyes, thoughts, desires and aspirations heavenward!

VII. Mary's Death and Assumption into Heaven

1. Mary died of divine love; 2. Mary's virginity and purity adorned her body with the light of

immortality; 3. Mary's humility exalted her above all the angels and saints.

1. Amadeus, a holy bishop of Lausanne in the twelfth century, tells us that "Mary bestowed on her Son the love she owed to God, and on God the love she owed to her Son." In Mary's heart nature and grace were combined and, as it were *unified,* for *her God was her Son,* and *her Son was her God.* In the miracle and mystery of the Incarnation the virtue (power) of the Most High overshadowed her, and there was an effusion from the heart of God into the heart of Mary; hence the union of the Saviour with Mary lay in the unity of the Father and the Son. Jesus never grew weary of being loved by Mary, His Mother, and Mary never thought that she loved her Divine Son enough, and ever prayed for more ardent love for Him, and her prayer ever drew upon her more abundant graces. Just as Jesus Christ longed for "His hour," so Mary longed for "her hour," that hour when she could be re-united to Jesus, who was her only love, her very life. Her longing was so vehement as to be able to draw her soul to Him out of her body, so that her death was rather the *cessation* of a continual miracle which was keeping her alive after her Son's Ascension into heaven, than a miracle of love and desire. We ought all to have a similar longing

for union with God in heaven, for, says St. Augustine, "he who, when a pilgrim or exile on earth, does not grieve, shall not rejoice as a citizen of heaven."

2. After her death Mary's body was preserved from corruption, not only on account of her spotless virginity and purity, but principally because her body had borne the Saviour and furnished the matter of His body. The Saviour, in His human nature, had been most intimately united to Mary, His Mother, and this intimate union was accomplished by a perfect conformity. Jesus chose as His Mother one who was similar to Himself. He, the Spouse of virgins, chose a virgin-mother as the foundation of this union. Hence we cannot form an adequate idea of Mary's eminent purity and virginity. According to St. Thomas, God bestowed on Mary an abundance of extraordinary graces, a heavenly dew, as it were, which not only tempered in her the fire of concupiscence, as in some of the saints, but even totally extinguished it as well as all evil inclination, and rendered her body truly angelic. Virginity makes human beings angels in the flesh, for, says St. Augustine, "in a material body virginity removes therefrom all that is carnal, and renders virgins more angelic than human." Mary's purity surpassed even that of the highest Seraphim, for Mary,

"the woman clothed with the sun" (Apoc. 12. 2), by her dazzling purity shines like the sun. All the other virgins, during their mortal life, carry "their *treasure in earthen vases*" (2 Cor. 4. 7).

3. Mary possessed three precious goods: sublime dignity, the most admirable purity of body and soul, and her well-beloved Son. Through humility Jesus Christ had deprived Himself of all earthly possessions. He, the Lord and Proprietor of the universe, was on earth as one without property, without possession. "As needy, yet enriching many; as having nothing, and possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6. 10). Through humility also Mary deprived herself of all her three possessions. First, of her dignity of Mother of God, for she considered herself as only a handmaid (servant) of the Lord; secondly, although the purest of virgins, she submitted to the ceremony of the purification, as if she were only an ordinary mother; and thirdly, when Jesus, dying on the cross, said to her, indicating St. John: "Behold thy son," she accepted and adopted St. John as her son. Wherefore, St. Augustine aptly remarks: "Jesus Christ, departing into the eternity of God from the human fragility He had assumed when born of a woman, delegates to a man the rights of human affection."

"This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened,

and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord God hath entered in by it" (Ezech. 44. 2). "Thou art beautiful above all the children of men; grace is poured abroad in thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever. . . . All the glory of the King's daughter is within. . . . After her shall virgins be brought into the temple of the King . . . with gladness and rejoicing" (Ps. 44. 10, 14, 15, 16). "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1. 46).

Mary's power in heaven. She is next to her Son, far above all the saints and angels. Hence St. Bernard asks: "Who is more competent than Mary in bliss to speak to the heart of Jesus" for us?

SELECTIONS FROM BRONCHAIN'S MEDITATIONS

I. The Angelic Salutation

1. Its contents. We begin the Hail Mary by congratulating the Blessed Mother of the Incarnate Word, in the words of the angel, on her grandeur, saying: "Hail Mary, full of grace." "This salutation," says St. Thomas, "surprises us by its novelty, for never had the like been addressed to man by an angel. The angel sent by God proclaims the humble and obscure virgin as 'full of grace,' for God the Father, in order to make her the worthy Mother of His divine Son, imparted to her so great a fulness of grace, that it would have been capable of sanctifying all mankind." This should strengthen our confidence when we pray to her. Our confidence increases even when we devoutly pronounce the name of Mary, for it is to us a name of sweetness, hope and love, a name that enlightens, strengthens and comforts all who invoke it.

"The Lord is with thee," that is, God is with Mary in a more special manner than with other

creatures. For is not the heavenly Father with Mary as with His most cherished Daughter, and the Son as with His most worthy Mother, and the Holy Ghost as with His most beloved Spouse? "Blessed art thou among women." O Mary, how different art thou from Eve, who fell under the curse of sin and dragged us along to ruin with her! To-day we are blessed with thee, O Mother of God, for thou hast become the Mother of our souls by the will of thy divine Son, and whence does this inestimable blessing come to us? From "Jesus, the blessed fruit of thy womb," and from thee, who art all-powerful with Him.

After thus saluting and praising the Blessed Virgin, we cast a look at ourselves, and fully aware of our misery we say to her: "Holy Mary, Mother of God." Children love to repeat their mother's name, and to praise her gifts and good qualities, and thus re-animate their love and confidence in her regard. But the purer and the more exalted Mary appears to us, the more we realize the extent of our wretchedness. Hence we add: "Pray for us, sinners." Pray "now," whilst we poor, weak creatures are struggling against the temptations of the world and the devil, our passions and evil habits, but "pray for us" more especially "at the hour of our death," at that

terrible hour on which our eternal lot depends, that we may depart this life, fit to be admitted among the angels and saints to love and praise God and thee forever in heaven.

2. Excellence of the Hail Mary. "The angelic salutation," says Bl. Albert the Great, "was dictated by God the Father, written by God the Son, and announced by the angel Gabriel." The words added by St. Elizabeth and by the Church, the Spouse of Jesus Christ, were equally inspired by the Spirit of God. Consequently, this prayer comes, not from the earth, but from heaven. For this reason also the Queen of heaven highly esteems it. One day St. Mechtildis said to Mary: "If I could salute thee with the sweetest salutation ever imagined by the human heart, how joyfully would I do so!" Forthwith the Queen of angels appeared to her, wearing on her breast the Angelic Salutation written in letters of gold, and said to her: "Never shall man be able to surpass this salutation. With it God the Father was the first to salute me, and exempted me from the fault of Eve by His omnipotence. With it the Son of God enlightened me with His infinite wisdom, in order to make me the brilliant heavenly body that imparts light to heaven and earth, according to the meaning of Mary, my name. With it the Holy Ghost, penetrating me

with the fulness of His divine sweetness, so filled me with His grace that all who seek it in me can surely find it." No prayer, then, is more pleasing to Mary than the Angelic Salutation. We should, therefore, always recite it with profound respect, imitating the angel Gabriel who accosted Mary with sincere humility and spoke to her with the deepest veneration. Let us ever bear in mind that her greatness is so sublime as to be above all human praise. But as Mary is also our Mother, we should add devotion and childlike confidence to our respect.

3. Practice of the Hail Mary, or the Angelus. To recall to the faithful the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word and Mary's Divine Maternity, the Church has enriched with indulgences the recitation of the Angelus, at the sound of the bell, three times a day, morning, noon and evening. This pious practice is a befitting means of honoring our spiritual Mother, by recalling to her her grandeurs and her privileges, and imploring her powerful protection. To this practice, so dear to the saints and to all devout clients of Mary, let us add that of reciting three Hail Mary's on rising in the morning and on retiring to rest at night, in honor of Mary's Immaculate Conception, with the intention of obtaining, or of preserving spotlessly the virtue of

holy purity. Let us also salute Mary every time we hear the clock strike, and, like St. Alphonsus, recite a Hail Mary before each action, such as prayer, reading, study, work, rest, our meals, our walks, recreations and journeys. But let us do so especially in danger, in the assaults of the devil, when there arise in us feelings of anger, impatience, repugnance, aversion, and whenever any of our passions are aroused. "Mary's power," says St. Anselm, "protects in a special manner the souls that frequently invoke her." Mary promised St. Gertrude as many helps at the hour of death as she would recite Hail Marys during her life.

(The devotion of the Rosary, that is, the daily recitation of the beads, is most earnestly recommended to all as a most powerful means of obtaining Mary's protection.)

II. Mary's Answer to the Angel Gabriel

1. Mary's humble and prudent answer, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." The Eternal Word, through the angel Gabriel, asked the Immaculate Virgin if she would consent to become His Mother, and she, instead of being puffed up with her own importance and breaking out in trans-

ports of joy, considered, on the one hand, her nothingness, and, on the other, the infinite Majesty of the Creator. She then acknowledged herself unworthy of the sublime dignity offered her. Nevertheless, unwilling to oppose the divine will, she surrenders herself to God's guidance, declaring herself His humble servant, as if she said: "Lord, why dost Thou condescend to ask this of me? Am I not Thy subject, and is it not my sacred duty to obey Thee, to submit wholly and unreservedly to Thy holy will? May it be done to me according to Thy word, and may all the glory be Thine!"

How full of humility and prudence is this admirable reply! Mary thereby not only preserves herself from all self-complacency, but also practises the most lively faith, the most sincere, devoted and complete self-surrender to the divine will. What greater wisdom could she show than entrust herself entirely to the Infinite Wisdom? How could she better safeguard her virginal purity than by confiding it to its Author, the Infinite Purity? Mary's answer was dictated by a consummate prudence, a prudence capable of repairing Eve's want of foresight in causing our ruin by her rash conversation with the infernal serpent.

2. Effects of Mary's prudent answer. The Holy Fathers all admire the wonderful efficacy of

Mary's answer. As soon as she had uttered *Fiat mihi,* "be it done to me according to thy word," the only begotten Son of God became the Son of Mary! "O powerful *Fiat,*" exclaimed St. Thomas of Villanova, "more powerful than the *Fiat* of the creation! Mary's *Fiat* united in one Person the human and the divine nature, that which is most abject in itself to that which is most sublime, our vile nothingness to God's Infinite Holiness." Does not this manifest the immense power imparted to Mary, which she may dispose of in our favor with her Divine Son?

This is still more clearly manifested by the effects which the Incarnation of the Son of God produced for all mankind. Mary had scarcely uttered her answer, when her answer gave us a Saviour, a Mediator between God and us, a worthy Repairer of our spiritual ruin. Thenceforth a new world, the world of grace is revealed to us. Immensely superior to the physical universe, this world of grace already gives mankind a glimpse of the coming Church of God spread throughout the world, together with its hierarchy, its most admirable Sacrifice of the Mass, its solemn and salutary Liturgy, its efficacious Sacraments, its superhuman power of binding and loosing, its learned Doctors, its numerous bands of Religions, its countless Saints, with Jesus

Christ, their Head, dwelling in the Church, in the Holy Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit animating and guiding the Church to the consummation of ages! O word of Mary, what wonders dost thou bring about! More effective than the word that created the universe, thou bringest forth the world of the elect!

And what shall we say of the eternal consequences of so many prodigies? Numberless are the souls, who during the past nineteen centuries have profited by the fruits of the Incarnation and will enjoy eternal happiness with God and His angels in heaven! How they will forever bless, thank and love the Virgin Mary for having, by her humility and prudence, so well joined our interests to her exaltation and indissolubly united our salvation to her Divine Maternity! When conceiving Jesus Christ for men's salvation, she begot us all for heaven!

III. The Divine Maternity

All that we can imagine as most sublime and exalted in nature, such as the regal power and majesty, the splendor and magnificence of the firmament, can bear no comparison with the superhuman grandeur of the Divine Maternity. Being a supernatural dignity, it is infinitely

exalted above everything created. Not even the very saints, clothed with all the prerogatives of grace and enriched with all the gifts of the Spirit of Love, can bear any comparison with the predestined Virgin-Mother of God. They are merely the servants of God, and Mary is the Mother of the only-begotten Son of God. The difference between all of them collectively and Mary is as great as between one's servants and one's own beloved mother.

Mary surpasses also all the heavenly spirits. "O Virgin-Mother," exclaims St. Sophronius, "who can describe thy grandeur? Thou art the glory of human nature; thou hast borne the palm over the sacred angelic hosts, and eclipsed the splendor of the archangels; thou art raised far above the thrones; thou art exalted above the dominations, and art far higher than the principalities; compared to thee the powers languish, and the virtues are but weakness; thy corporal eye is more piercing than the eyes of the cherubim, and, upheld by the divine breath, the flight of thy soul is swifter than that of the six-winged seraphim. In a word, thou alone among all creatures hast deserved to be the Mother of God."

The dignity of Mother of God not only surpasses all the wonders of nature, all created grandeurs and all the sublimity of the angels and

saints combined, but also far excels all the other gifts and privileges of Mary, for all these were conferred on her merely to adorn her Divine Maternity, such as, for instance, her Immaculate Conception, her inviolable virginity, her holiness superior to that of all creatures combined. Hence St. Anselm exclaims: "O glorious Virgin, nothing either in heaven or on earth equals thee, for, God alone excepted, everything that exists is below thee!" What a powerful motive have we not to honor Mary! And how reverently should we pronounce her name, offer her our homages, meditate on her glories and invoke her in our wants!

O prodigy of the goodness of the Incarnate Word! Whilst humbling and abasing Himself, He exalts Mary, His Mother, beyond all human conception! By becoming the Son of man, He makes her the Mother of God! Her dignity is incomparably more sublime than that of the highest seraph. St. Thomas of Villanova asks: "Why are the evangelists, who so minutely relate the praises of Magdalen, so brief in mentioning the glories of the Immaculate Virgin? And yet what greater praise can they give her than to tell us that she is the Mother of God?" This praise far excels everything else that can be said of her. In fact, to say that she is the Mother of God, is

to declare that she is "the Virgin predestined before all ages," immaculate in her Conception, the holiest among creatures, the most deserving of all of the blessings of heaven and earth. "He that is mighty," says Mary herself, "hath done great things to me." But why does she not enumerate or explain these "great things"? "Because," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "they are simply inexplicable," for they surpass all human understanding. They are mysteries which can be fathomed only by an infinite power, wisdom and goodness. As the Saviour's human nature cannot be raised higher than it is by its union with the Person of the Divine Word, so, in like manner, the Blessed Virgin cannot be more exalted than she has been in becoming the Mother of God, for, says the Angelic Doctor, "the Divine Maternity is, in some manner, infinite."

How much should we not honor such a dignity, the splendor of which is reflected on us! Mary is human by nature as we are, and we are her children by grace. Therefore, she is our spiritual Mother, and without her, we should not have Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Brother! Without her Divine Maternity, we should be merely the slaves of sin and vice and of Satan, the haunts of demons, the victims of eternal death, and fuel for the fire of hell! Let us congratulate Mary

on her sublime dignity and thank her for being instrumental in saving us from hell!

IV. The Name of Mary

Its Power. "Thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of the soul" (Is. 26. 8). Names recall to us the persons bearing them, their qualities, their virtues, their greatness, and, in some manner, partake of their excellence, power and goodness. As we obtain all heavenly goods by praying God for them in the name of Jesus, so, in like manner, by devoutly invoking the name of Mary, the Dispensatrix of grace, all helps are granted to us in proportion to our desires, confidence and spiritual wants.

According to St. Bonaventure the name of Mary has three meanings: Star of the sea, sovereign or Dominatress (*domina*), Ocean of bitterness. As "Star of the sea," Mary, on being invoked, obtains for us light to dispel our darkness, to banish from our mind the false principles of the world, and to indicate to us the secure way to perfection and salvation.

Mary, besought as our "Sovereign," procures us victory in all temptations, especially in those against holy purity. "He who is careful to invoke Mary in such temptations," says St. Alphon-

sus, "has a sure sign that he remained pure amid the defilements of the imagination and concupiscence."

As "Ocean of bitterness" the name of Mary recalls to us the keen and intense sufferings of our spiritual Mother. When we join it to the name of Jesus, we easily recall Calvary, where the Victims of our salvation with one heart immolated themselves for us, sinners, and by their example, animated and encouraged us cheerfully to accept our trials and sufferings. Let us, then, hearken to the words of St. Bernard: "In danger, anguish and doubt, think on Mary, invoke Mary. May her blessed name, united to that of Jesus, never be far from your lips or from your heart."

One day our divine Saviour said to St. Bridget of Sweden, that He would impart three precious graces to all who would invoke with confidence the august name of His Blessed Mother: perfect contrition with the remission of their sins; the means of fully satisfying the divine justice and avoiding the pains of purgatory; the strength to persevere in grace and reach heaven.

We owe respect to the name of Mary as well as to herself. Unlike the other names on earth invented by men, the name of Mary, proceeding from the heart of God Himself, came from heaven.

The Father endowed it with power, the Son, with wisdom, and the Holy Ghost, with charity. The Holy Trinity raised it, next that of Jesus, above every other name, so that it should draw the veneration of heaven, earth and hell. But our respect should never diminish our confidence, for Mary, our Sovereign, is also our Mother and we are her children, and, next to the name of Jesus, there is no other name than that of Mary, from which devout souls derive so many graces and consolations. "We never pronounce the name of Mary with love without obtaining some spiritual profit," says St. Bernard. In the name of Mary St. Antony of Padua found the same charms as St. Bernard in the name of Jesus: "It is joy to my heart, honey to my mouth, a sweet melody to my ear." Let us often pronounce the holy name of Mary with affection and out of love, so that, as St. Ambrose says, "the perfume of grace penetrating it, may descend into our inmost soul and fill it with heavenly sweetness."

V. The Visitation

The Son of God had scarcely become incarnate, when, desiring to dispense to men the first fruits of the Redemption, He inspired His Virgin-Mother to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Mary,

ever faithful, ever obedient to the divine inspirations, set out at once on her journey. On arriving at the house of Zachary, she saluted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's voice, St. John Baptist was sanctified before his birth, and his mother Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. O consoling mystery! Elizabeth represents the Church, and John Baptist, the faithful in the Church. Through Mary's mediation the Church receives the Holy Ghost, and the faithful are sanctified. It is, then, Mary, our spiritual Mother, who gave us birth to grace and glory; she cannot forget us after her divine Son so touchingly commended us to her. It is Mary who has the mission to dispense divine grace to us.

O delightful truth! I ventured not to present myself before my Judge, yet I needed to speak to Him, to pray to Him, to receive His favors. Seeing my perplexity, He gave me His own Mother, and in order that she might inspire me with greater confidence, He even made her my Mother that she might transmit to my soul the food and the means requisite for salvation. She is, then, my Mother and loves me with invincible tenderness and constancy. Wherefore St. Bernardine of Siena rightly calls her "the dispensatrix of the graces of sanctification, to whom we may always have recourse without ever fearing a re-

fusal." "Blessed art thou, O Mary, because thou hast believed," said Elizabeth to thee; and blessed are we also, if we believe in the power of thy mediation, in the riches of grace entrusted to thee, in the generous love that prompts thee to lavish them on us!

VI. Mary's Share in the Sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary

The prophet Isaias, foretelling the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our salvation says: "He was offered, because it was His will" (53. 7). We may apply the same words to Mary, for she had but one will with her divine Son; hence we may say: "Jesus was offered, because Mary, His Mother, consented to it."

How great was the anguish of Abraham from the day when God demanded of him the sacrifice of his son Isaac, until the moment when the angel arrested his arm already raised to sacrifice his beloved son! But how great and deep the sorrow Mary endured during the thirty-three long years preceding the passion and death of her only Son Jesus! In the most keen and intense anguish she would contemplate Him, whom she loved as her Son and her God, and would behold in spirit all the bitter torments and ignominies that were

to be inflicted on Him. What a terrible and protracted martyrdom did she not endure! And how wonderful her resignation and unreserved acceptance of the divine will and her perfect conformity thereto!

Mary's merit, moreover, is enhanced by the infinite worth of the Victim and the immense love of the heart of her who made the offering. The Victim immolated is the well-beloved Son of God, and it is His Mother who presents Him to the heavenly Father, uniting herself to Jesus who is both Priest and Victim of the Sacrifice offered for the Redemption of mankind. There can be no other sacrifice so sublime or so worthy of God's supreme Majesty, or so capable of giving Him the honor and glory due to Him.

Wherefore, many are the blessings that flowed therefrom to Mary and to us! "Because thou hast done this thing," said God to Abraham, "and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee and multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea-shore" (Gen. 22. 16, 17). And to Mary God seems to say: "Because thou hast immolated thy beloved Son, infinitely greater and more precious than Isaac, I appoint thee the Dispensatress of all the benefits and graces of the Redemption; and all the just, more numerous than the

stars of heaven, shall be thy privileged children; and sinners, figured by the moving sand on the sea-shore, shall be the children of thy sorrows and compassion. Thou shalt feed them all with the milk of grace, and rear them for life everlasting." Such is the reward bestowed on Mary for her heroic sacrifice.

Whilst Mary was receiving in her arms the Saviour's body all covered with wounds and blood, the Eternal Father from the highest heaven entrusted to her all the riches of heaven together with the power to dispose of them, as she willed, in favor of mankind, for, by the will of her divine Son, men had become her children. Hence for us she is the Mother of salvation, and whenever we devoutly and with confidence have recourse to her, she will open for us the treasures of God and the gate of heaven!

VII. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

1. *Taught us by the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.* The adorable Trinity has given us the example of doing homage to the most pure, the most holy and sublime of creatures. The Eternal Father, treating her as His favorite Daughter, endowed her from her very conception with gifts, prerogatives and favors immensely

superior to those of all the angels and saints combined. God the Son, choosing her as His beloved Mother, manifested to her the most perfect obedience, respect and filial love. Daily He saluted her, thanked her, honored her with the most respectful veneration and the tenderest affection. What a beautiful model for us! The Holy Ghost predestined her as His most pure Spouse, and entrusted to her the benefits and graces of the Redemption, so that, being herself superabundantly enriched thereby, she may be enabled, as St. Alphonsus teaches, to dispense to all men the necessary and superabundant graces of salvation. Hence we may say that even the Creator Himself cannot bestow on a mere creature greater honor, confidence and love than He has shown to Mary.

Wherefore the Church, inspired by her divine Founder, considers it but just and consistent with the honor due to the Son of God Himself, to raise the honor paid to Mary next to that due to God. Every year she devotes to honoring the Mother of God in a special manner two whole months, May and October, and solemnly celebrates in her honor the feasts of her Immaculate Conception, Nativity, Holy Name, Annunciation, Sorrows, Assumption and others. Every week she reserves the Saturday to honor her; three times every day she

invites the faithful to greet her at the ringing of the Angelus in order to recall the unspeakable mystery in which Mary, by becoming the Mother of God, became also our Mother and our powerful Advocate with the Almighty. Innumerable are the sanctuaries and shrines dedicated to her and the beautiful and well-deserved titles by which she is invoked in the whole Church. Thus does the Church of Jesus Christ practically confirm what her doctors and saints have written and preached concerning her power and goodness.

2. *Its beneficial results.* If the child that loves not its mother is called *unnatural,* what will the angels call us, if we manifest no love for Mary? Did she not bring us forth on Calvary to grace and glory in the greatest anguish and pain? And has she not since then been our Nurse in the order of salvation? Who has ever invoked her aid and failed to receive assistance? All the sinners that have cast off the shackles of their slavery have done so only with Mary's help. All the innocent souls that have persevered in the path of virtue owe this boon to her special protection.

Even the saints now enjoying heavenly glory, such as Saints Ephrem, Bernardine of Siena, Philip Neri, Alphonsus, and numerous others, all acknowledge that, next to Jesus, they owe their heavenly crown to Mary. The doctors of the

Church ascribe to her the honor of their light and learning, and with St. Cyril, proclaim her the inextinguishable Lamp and the Queen of the true faith. The virgins refer to her the honor of their virginity, the martyrs, of their patience and fortitude, and all the saints, of their virtues. "Through Mary," says St. Cyril, "heaven triumphs, the angels and archangels rejoice, the devils are put to flight, and all mankind are placed again in the way leading to eternal bliss."

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY PRAISED BY A WOMAN IN THE CROWD

(Luke 11. 14–28)

The Blessed Virgin Mary in her visit to St. Elizabeth had foretold that "henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke 1. 48, 49). This prophecy began to be fulfilled already during her life, and this, too, publicly in the very presence of her divine Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. On a certain day when Jesus was preaching to a great multitude, a man possessed by a devil was brought to Him. The devil had made the man dumb. "When Jesus had cast out the devil," says the evangelist, "the dumb (man) spoke; and the multitudes were in admiration at it. But some of them (the enemies of Jesus) said: He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. . . . But Jesus, seeing their thoughts, said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and house upon house shall fall. And if Satan also be divided against himself, how shall

his kingdom stand?" Jesus continued preaching to the eagerly listening and admiring multitude around him. "And it came to pass as He spoke," says St. Luke, "that a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to Him: Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck." This woman, in saying this, only voiced the thoughts of the majority of the audience, for all were so filled with admiration at the great power and the admirable teaching of Jesus, that they naturally reverted to the thought of how happy must not the Mother of such a Son be, who was bringing to mankind the kingdom of God, as He Himself rightly declared: "If I by the finger of God cast out devils; doubtless the kingdom of God is come upon you." The natural conclusion which the woman and the multitude drew from all they had seen and heard, was that Jesus was the promised and expected Messias, and that His Mother was the blessed woman who was to "crush the head of the serpent," or devil, and therefore how natural for a woman, most probably a mother herself, to express her admiration and praise of the fortunate Mother of such a Son as Jesus, who could cast out devils and impart such admirable doctrines! Hence we perceive how well the woman was fulfilling Mary's prophecy by publicly calling her "blessed," on

account of "the great things" the Almighty had done to her, by choosing her as the Mother of the Saviour of mankind. Moreover, the woman's praise of Mary also implied a confession of the two natures in Jesus, the divine and the human, and of Mary's divine Maternity. Thus was this woman's praise of Mary the beginning of the *public* fulfilment of Mary's prophecy "henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

When the woman had finished expressing her admiration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jesus said: "Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." Although our divine Saviour by these words seems to make but little account of this woman's direct praise of His Mother and of the implied praise of Himself, He, nevertheless, admits and confirms what she said, and actually adds thereto His own praise of His Mother's real holiness. The word "yea" means "what you say is true" and is, therefore, a confirmation of the woman's declaration of Mary's blessedness; and the word "rather" indicates that there is greater blessedness still in hearing and keeping the word of God than in being His Mother. In this manner, Jesus turns away all praise of Himself, and adds a greater praise of His Mother's blessedness on account of

her virtue and acquired merits in perfectly fulfilling the will of God in all things. In fact, no one ever more willingly heard and more faithfully believed and kept the word of God and co-operated with divine grace than the Virgin Mary, and therefore no one was ever more blessed than she. Moreover, Jesus Christ, by His saying, taught His hearers and all future generations a practical lesson concerning the necessity for salvation of hearing the word of God and faithfully putting it into practice. Mary's incomparable dignity of Mother of God was a grace, a gift of God bestowed on her principally for the salvation of mankind, and her incomparable and constant fidelity to God's law constituted her personal merits and rendered her worthy of the divine Maternity.

The lesson Jesus taught the Jews by His saying was very much needed by the Jews of that time, for they gloried, not in the practice of virtue, of the commandments of God, but principally in their being descendants of Abraham, in sticking to the letter of their law and in observing mere human traditions, and failing altogether to imitate the virtues of their ancestor, not entering into the spirit of the law, and hating and rejecting Jesus Christ as the Messias for not following their views. Jesus thus showed them that the

fact of their being Israelites, descendants of Abraham, would not save them, if they did not follow the example of Abraham in his faith and in his simple and childlike obedience to the divine law. In like manner, the mere fact of our being Catholics, of possessing the true faith, will not save us, if we do not live as it behooves Catholics to live. It is our fidelity in keeping the commandments of God that constitutes our merits and imparts to us the claim and the right to heavenly reward. We should consider in the Blessed Virgin Mary and in the saints of God, not so much the extraordinary favors they received from God, as their exact and constant fidelity in fulfilling God's holy will in all things. Hence if we wish to be saved, we must lead a good Christian life in accordance with the word of God, that is, with the teaching of our holy faith. Our divine Saviour expressly declares that keeping the word of God is more profitable to us than the name of Catholic, of a disciple of Jesus Christ, than even being a near relative of His: "My Mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 8. 21). Unless we do this, all the rest will profit us nothing! Let us, therefore, not only honor the Blessed Virgin Mary by our prayers and praises, but more especially by imitating her constant fidelity in doing the will

of God. This is our principal obligation, and if we faithfully perform it, it will secure us the happiness of seeing, loving and praising Jesus and Mary forever in heaven.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

1. Why do we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary? First, because God Himself has given us the example; secondly, because she is the Mother of God, and all the honor we pay her redounds to the honor and glory of God Himself; thirdly, because all the honor we pay her is a profession of faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God; fourthly, because her divine Son Jesus Christ, the object and end of all our worship and devotion, is the Model of all holiness and virtue; hence the nearer our devotion leads us to Him, the greater will be our resemblance to Him; therefore also the dearer to us should be the devotion to His Mother, since Jesus Himself, the most dutiful of sons, so greatly honored, loved and obeyed her on earth and exalts her above all creatures in heaven; the more, therefore, we honor, love and confide in Mary, the more also we resemble Jesus Christ.

2. In the next place, no creature resembles Jesus Christ in virtue and holiness as much as His Blessed Mother. The true servant, the true

child of Mary is not content with merely honoring and invoking her, but earnestly endeavors to imitate her virtues, to resemble her and deserve her protection and assistance, and, consequently, to love Jesus Christ very much and imitate His virtues, and thus to lead a truly holy life. Furthermore, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to us through Mary, and it is through Mary that we can more easily and more surely go to Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Through Mary Jesus Christ became human like us, and it is through Mary that we can become, as it were, godlike, or, as St. Peter expresses it, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1. 4).

3. Moreover, he who truly loves Mary, loves Jesus also, since he loves Mary *because* she is the Mother of Jesus. But he who has no love for Mary, whom Jesus has so greatly honored and loved, will have but little love for Jesus, whatever he may say to the contrary. The members of the various sects, professing to be Christian, who refuse to honor and love the Mother of Jesus, have gradually lost all sincere love for and faith in Jesus Christ, so that practically the majority of Protestants now no longer believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ!

4. The Son of God most assuredly chose as His Mother her who was truly (intrinsically) the

most worthy of this most sublime of dignities, and of His respect and love, for only such a one was fit to become the nearest blood relation, the only human parent of the Son of God, and thus enable Him to redeem mankind by His passion and death on the cross. Her worthiness could not consist in exterior qualifications, such as corporeal charms or beauty, wealth, high station in life, talents, worldly influence, renown or power; for real worth, real merit is essentially interior and pertains to the soul, and consists necessarily in virtue, in moral worth or good qualities, for "all the glory of the king's daughter is from within" (Ps. 44. 14). Therefore, when we honor Mary and offer her our devotions, we honor the creature that is the most holy, the most virtuous, the most pleasing to and the most beloved and exalted by God Himself.

5. We cannot overrate Mary's power and influence with God any more than we can overrate God's love for her. Well may we consider Jesus saying to Mary the words King Solomon addressed to Bethsabee, his mother: "My mother, ask, for I must not turn away thy face" (3 Kings 2. 20), that is, "I cannot refuse thee anything thou askest Me." Wherefore we cannot honor or love Mary too much, or have too much confidence in her power, in her love for us, her spirit-

ual children, as we have been made by the last will of Jesus Christ, for, as we have seen, when He was dying on the cross, He made her our Mother, and made us her children, that we might honor and love her as our most tender Mother, and that she might be ever most ready and willing to help and protect us in all our wants and bring us to heaven. Let us, therefore, daily thank Jesus from our inmost heart for this inappreciable favor and gift, and daily make use of it by honoring and loving Mary as our beloved Mother and praying to her in all our needs. Let us especially beseech her to obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins, a daily increase in divine love, the grace of perseverance and her most powerful assistance now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

THE DAILY PRAYER OF ST. ALPHONSUS TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Most holy immaculate Virgin and my Mother Mary, to thee, who art the Mother of my Lord, the Queen of the world, the Advocate, the Hope and the Refuge of sinners, I have recourse to-day, I who am the most miserable of all. I render thee my most humble homages, O great Queen, and I thank thee for all the graces thou hast conferred on me until now; particularly for having delivered me from hell, which I have so often deserved. I love thee, O most amiable Lady, and for the love which I bear thee, I promise to serve thee always, and to do all in my power to make others love thee also. I place in thee all my hopes, I confide my salvation to thy care. Accept me for thy servant, and receive me under thy mantle, O Mother of mercy. And since thou art so powerful with God, deliver me from all temptations, or rather obtain for me the strength to triumph over them until death. Of thee I ask a perfect love for Jesus Christ. Through thee I hope to die a good death. O my Mother, by the

love which thou bearest to God, I beseech thee to help me at all times, but especially at the last moment of my life. Leave me not, I beseech thee, until thou seest me safe in heaven, blessing thee and singing thy mercies for all eternity. Amen. So I hope. So may it be.

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE "BLESSED FRUIT OF THE WOMB OF MARY"

(From the larger History of the Church by Darras)

St. Athanasius, in his Sermon on the Incarnation of the Word, speaks as follows: "Where is the wise man, the revealer, the human philosopher whose teaching has wrought the miracle of enlightening the world from the dungeon of the slave to the very throne of the monarch, and of impressing its religious seal on every brow? If Jesus was a mere man, He should naturally have failed, like all the other teachers of men before Him, to overthrow the false deities of the ancients. When Jesus was born, powerful monarchs and influential leaders of men were not wanting. The Chaldeans had their learned men, their Magi; Egypt and India abounded in them. What king, what wise man, when at the summit of his glory and influence, ever succeeded in rendering his teaching universal, in withdrawing mankind out of the darkness of idolatry? The philosophers of Greece wrote many eloquent

pages. But compare the puny effects of their grand discourses to the wonderful conquests realized by the apparent folly of the Cross of Jesus Christ. When a philosopher died, his teaching gradually sank into oblivion; and even whilst its author was still living, it was powerless to triumph over the attacks and controversies of its rivals. The Son of God appeared on earth; disdaining the pomp of language, He borrowed the idiom of the lowly, just as He had adopted their poverty, and His teaching completely eclipsed that of all the philosophers, overthrowing all their vain theories and systems, and drawing all men to Himself. Where is the philosopher who converted souls, rendered chaste the heart that had been defiled by debauchery, wrested the weapons from murderous hands, and inspired the most timid and pusillanimous with superhuman courage and fortitude? What is it that subjugated barbarism and transformed the pagan world? Was it not the faith of Jesus Christ?"

When Jesus Christ came upon earth, the world was pagan, lust, infamous lust was a goddess worshiped by all, revenge was considered a duty, and indulgence in sensual pleasures was looked upon as a supreme law, every human passion had an altar, a deity of its own, its incense and sacrifices; the basest, most degrading and corrupt

inclinations were deified and adored. All of a sudden there appeared in the world a few Galilean fishermen, devoid of learning, of eloquence, of credit, of influence, of power, of every human prestige; they at once began to wage war against the world inebriated with sensualism, saying: "Lust shall lose its existence and its very name among us; the cross of Jesus Christ is our only delight! If you are struck on one cheek, offer your other cheek to the striker,— mortify your flesh and reduce it to subjection; blessed are the poor in spirit, the humble, the chaste, the meek, the merciful, the suffering, the unjustly persecuted." That was their teaching, and their conduct was its faithful practice. And the world, disturbed in its habits of self-indulgence, grew furious against those who sought to rid it of its covetousness, of its lusts, of its orgies and shameless rites and deities. The new preachers were pitilessly butchered, burnt and crucified. Monarchs, peoples, courtiers, philosophers, writers, every one possessed of a scepter, of a weapon, of a pen, of any power or influence whatsoever, waged a relentless war against them, and sought to invent new tortures to exterminate the so-called enemies of mankind! This has been going on for nineteen centuries, with various intervals, each of which has been followed

by other frenzies, and, nevertheless "the Word made flesh" is adored and faithfully served as the true God by the best, the most virtuous and the most enlightened portion of mankind. And where is now the school of Socrates? Where are now the disciples of Plato? Where is the religion of Aristotle, of Pythagoras? Who now cares for them? How many persons in the civilized world know nothing at all about these vaunted sages! And over how many more has not the religion of Jesus Christ triumphed, how many sects has it buried with its persecutors, who are now unhonored and are now remembered only by their failure to destroy the religion of Jesus Christ?

How often has it not happened that a man, reared in infidelity, a professional unbeliever, even while perusing an infidel book, suddenly closes it, saying: "A mere man could not have converted the world; therefore Jesus Christ is God!" and he who has been hitherto dead to the Christian faith, is raised to the true life, to the immortal and even triumphant life of Jesus Christ. Were not the Roman soldiers who crucified Him, the first to exclaim: "Truly that man was the Son of God!" Since then, how many, having begun by unbelief, have ended in firmly believing! Jesus Christ outraged and reviled is

always on His cross, but He usually converts His executioners. How often does it not happen that a man, after spending twenty, thirty, forty, or more years in ignoring and scoffing at the light of Jesus Christ, at length entering seriously into himself, reads, studies the Gospel, and enlightened thereby, accepts and embraces the Christian faith, although in doing so he must sacrifice his pride, his avarice, his ambition, his love of pleasure, his passions, his future temporal interests and prospects, and humbly go to cast himself at the feet of a priest and declare his hidden and most humiliating sins! He is the prodigal son returning repentant to his Father; he is Lazarus, spiritually dead and filled with corruption, now raised to a new and holy life of self-sacrifice and virtue.

Jesus Christ, the miracle of the "Word made flesh," is to-day as living as He was in the crib, in the temple of Jerusalem, in the Last Supper room, at the tribunals of Caiphas and Pilate; as living as He was when He was nailed to the cross. By the side of the Magi adoring Him there are Herods seeking to put Him to death; by the side of the doctors admiring the wisdom of His answers there are pseudo-scientists seeking to convict Him of ignorance, contradictions and errors; by the side of the faithful disciples

there are Judases betraying Him with a kiss; by the side of the proconsul washing his hands through indifference, there are holy souls interceding for the Just One; by the side of the multitude led astray and clamoring for His blood, there are countless multitudes of faithful souls gathering up every drop of it, in order to find the true life therein; by the side of the Jews sealing His tomb there are pious women beholding the passage of the angel of the resurrection; by the side of the Galileans, still gazing towards Jesus ascending heavenward and out of sight there are always saints going to seek and join Him in heaven. Jesus, in fact, still lives! His history, unlike that of Alexander and Cesar, did not die with the times in which it shone in the world. No; for daily is Jesus Christ again made flesh in a stable and born in a soul previously defiled; every day His voice says to some one that is dead: "Lazarus, come forth"! And Lazarus comes forth alive from the tomb of sin! Daily does Jesus repeat to some new apostate: "Friend, for what art thou come hither?" And the Son of man again suffers Himself to be betrayed by a kiss. Daily does He hear the confession of a Samaritan woman; daily does He open the eyes of one born blind, raise to life the son of a widow of Naim, die on Calvary and con-

vert a thief. "Arrest, bind, scourge, crucify Him;" that immortal Dead One! daily resound the cries of the rabble, "Away with Him! He disturbs our peace; He conspires against Cesar!" He is scourged, crowned with thorns, has a reed, instead of a scepter, placed in His hand; He is buffeted and asked: "What is truth?" He is silent, undergoes outrages, insults, ignominy, derision, blasphemies; He is shown to the people: "Behold the man!" He is dragged to execution. A few shed tears over Him on His way. He still says: "Weep not over Me, but over yourselves and your children." He is nailed to the tree of infamy; His heart is pierced; He is laid in the tomb. But He always rises again to life; and His executioners are the first to exclaim: "That man was truly the Son of God." This has happened again and again for nineteen centuries. For nineteen centuries this wonderful drama has been re-enacted without interruption. Every time the actors, under new names, are animated with a similar hatred towards the same Immaculate Victim, and the drama always ends in the similar triumphant resurrection of Him whom they supposed to be forever dead and buried. He who does not discover therein a miracle, or rather, a constant series of miracles, a permanent and abiding mira-

cle, is hopelessly blind in all that pertains to history.

There is scarcely a more striking proof of the divine inspiration of the Gospel than the prolonged life of the Evangelical Narrative throughout all ages. Such a demonstration, by its very nature, is within the reach of all minds, for it requires neither laborious study nor scientific researches. The apparition on earth of the Incarnate Word is undeniably established by the perpetuity of the Incarnation of the Word in men's souls. The miracles of Jesus Christ in Judea are the same that He in our times renews all over the world, and that He will not fail to accomplish as long as the world shall subsist. The simple text of the Gospel will suffice for the history of the future, as it has sufficed for the past nineteen centuries. How many books enjoy so prodigious a power? The greatest geniuses of Greece and Rome have left works that are called immortal. With the exception of a comparatively few learned men, who is it that has read them? But especially, where are the individuals that have put them into practice? Where is the soul that owes its spiritual resurrection to those books? Where is the human conscience which they have re-animated? From time to time some official university eulogium from the

leaders of science reminds the world that Plato wrote books, that Cicero and Demosthenes made speeches, and that Seneca philosophized! Countless doctrines, theories and discussions, and systems of philosophy have passed away with those illustrious dead and their disciples; men now and then consent transiently to admire that extinguished eloquence, the beauty of that style, the rhythm of that verse, the purity of that form, just as a traveler pauses for a moment to salute an archæological ruin. But the Gospel is living; it is always the daily bread of the multitudes, the spiritual food of souls. In all languages, under every sky, at all hours this book is read, studied, admired, put into practice as the rule of conduct. We might say that this book is of such a nature as daily to transport into the souls of men the life of the Divine Word, of which the Gospel itself is the manifestation. Therefore, the Gospel is a real fact ever reproduced, ever fertile, ever inexhaustible, and, at the same time, it is a doctrine permanent, immutable, ever ancient and ever new. Has man ever written a book that exercises or can ever exercise so great a power, so wonderful an influence?

All the light of the Incarnate Word, all the wonders of the Gospel have been so divinely tem-

pered and so wisely managed in their effulgence over the world as to captivate our faith without compulsion. The respect with which God, in His first revelation, had treated man's free will, is found in a still more admirable manner in the Christian revelation. The Divine Word made flesh and come upon earth, was apt to be disowned and rejected by mankind; but the result is a fresh miracle, and most evidently so the series of prodigies that have been wrought. For, if the planetary system necessarily gravitates around our sun, do we understand how it is that the Word of God, the Sun of created minds, could descend into the depths of our human darkness without totally absorbing and removing, by His immense light, every obscurity, every gloom? And, nevertheless, were this the case, were our assent not free, were our mind not free to accept or repel that light, we should be subjugated by a fatal law, and the responsibility and merit of our actions would vanish entirely. This is the reason why, in the divine plan of the Incarnation, the brightness of the Divine Word is, as it were, kept in the back-ground, as if fearing to invade too far the freedom of man's will. This is why the permanent miracle of the Gospel will always be opposed by many by perpetual negation. Jesus could have been born and have con-

tinued to live among men under such conditions and under such a form as to take forcible possession of the human conscience and will, by causing the dazzling rays of His glory to penetrate everywhere and completely subjugate the minds and hearts of all. In that case faith would be replaced by clear sight, but then the activity of man's mind would be extinguished in an inert contemplation. Man would then have nothing to conquer; but he would himself be conquered indeed, and besides annulled, as it were, for in such a case the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ would have become impossible. But the Son of God, who willed to be born in a stable and to die on a cross, veiling His Majesty under the swathing bands of infancy and the ignominy of a public execution, has never ceased and never will cease, until the end of time, to be "a sign of contradiction" raised for the voluntary ruin or the voluntary resurrection of the multitudes. If Jesus is daily born in holy souls, He daily dies by the hand of the executioner, that is, of sinners, repeating His divine prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

The name of Jesus Christ is the link uniting together the two ages of human history. The Redeemer was promised, prefigured, predicted, designated beforehand and expected during four

thousand years. Before the unbeliever can logically attack the Gospel, he must first overthrow all the Books of the Old Testament announcing the coming of the Messias; he must also destroy all the monuments of the Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman literatures uniformly attesting the belief of the world in a future Redemption. Not only the written monuments of the various ancient civilisations, hitherto studied, proclaim the primitive fall of man, the necessity of his rehabilitation and the faith in a future Revealer, but the very stones hold the very same language. Before you can attempt to destroy Christianity, it behooves you first to destroy in the whole world all the souvenirs in stone, the statues, bas-reliefs, columns, triumphal arches, antique marbles and bronzes; it behooves you besides previously to turn upside down the crust of the earth, and when you are through with all these destructions, you shall be obliged to prevent new haphazard investigations from suddenly revealing another fresh witness of the ancient faith in the Redeemer. And after all this your labor will be still incomplete. There is something far longer-lived than books, far more durable than monuments, the various human races themselves. All the races among which idolatry still reigns are

unanimous in the belief in the primitive fall of man and the necessity of a Mediator between sinful man and the Creator. Wherefore you shall have to do away with all these races of men, before you can reach the Messianic character of Jesus Christ.

The historical position of Jesus Christ in the ancient world is a fact that is already sufficiently wonderful. It is, indeed, a miracle that it should have obtained so prominent a place among mankind and taken such deep root in their minds, that the Messias cannot be done away with without annihilating all history. And, nevertheless, all this forms scarcely the hem of the divine garment of Jesus Christ. A universal belief in a future Redeemer might indeed, strictly speaking, be made use of by a real genius and end in a usurpation of the title. But God has made due provision against such an occurrence, against all deception. The Old Testament, as a whole, is only the description, continued from age to age, of the future Messias; it describes Him with the most minute exactness. Infidels and rationalists do not like the Old Testament, and this for obvious reasons. Every new teacher of unbelief aims at destroying a witness so disadvantageous to his theory. But all their efforts have failed and must necessarily al-

ways fail of success. Their mode of attack must necessarily result in utter failure, for lacking all direct, all well-grounded proof, it occupies itself only in interminable philological discussions on certain Hebrew words, on their roots, on their equivalents in the Aryan or Semitic languages, in pedantic scaffoldings of grammar; on the rather conceited pretension of knowing Greek better than the Jews who made the Septuagint version; in geological, chemical or physiological theories; or even in the incidents of some obscure fact or detail not yet sufficiently cleared up: this is the summary of all the attempts hitherto made by unbelievers to disprove the Old Testament. All their efforts have had no other result than to bring together a few clouds, which have been easily dispersed by the first blow of a pick in an historic field or in a soil of the *diluvium*. The Old Testament has two guards which must be annihilated before it can even be touched; first, the Jewish race which, relying wholly on the Old Testament, still persists in expecting the Messias. So long as there exists an Israelite, nothing can be effected against the Sacred Books of his law. Go then, exterminate a whole race left standing distinct from every other race after nineteen centuries of disasters, persecutions and insults; and after you shall have slain them all

even to the very last, you shall find yourself face to face with the Christian universe presenting to you the Sacred Books of the Jews, triumphant and immortal!

Historically the Old Testament is an unexceptionable monument. It contains a minute description of the Messias. The first trait goes back to the day of the fall in the Garden of Eden. It is a divine, detailed promise: "The woman (or her seed) shall crush the serpent's head" (Gen. 3. 15). Therefore the Redeemer was to be the son of a woman; God does not designate for him an earthly father. The Redeemer shall crush the head of Satan; He will not be a mere philosopher, a wise man destroying a few errors, reforming certain practical abuses; but He shall be endowed with superhuman power to crush absolutely error and evil in their very source. The Redeemer "in whom all nations shall be blessed, shall be of the race of Abraham" (Gen. 18, 18; 22. 18). The Messias "of the eternal hills," "the Desired of the nations" shall appear "when the scepter shall have gone out of the house of Juda" (Gen. 49. 10). "He shall be the Son of David" (2 Kings 7. 19; 23. 5; Ps. 131. 11), and "though His generation is eternal" (Is. 53. 8), "He shall be born at Bethlehem" (Mich. 5. 2). "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son,

whose name shall be Emmanuel" (God with us) (Is. 7. 14). "He shall be Christ, the King of Israel" (Dan. 9. 25). "Jesus the Saviour" (Hab. 3. 18). "A star shall rise over Jacob" (Numb. 24. 17). "The kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring Him presents" (Ps. 71. 10). "He shall be called out of Egypt" (Osee 11. 1). "A voice shall cry out of the desert, and another Elias shall be the precursor of Christ" (Is. 40. 3). The Messias shall have the same authority as Moses (Deut. 18. 15–18). "He shall be a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech" (Ps. 109. 4). He is called "King of eternity" (Dan. 7. 14; Mich. 4. 7). He shall speak "to the humble and contrite of heart" (Is. 61. 1). "The eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf shall be opened, the lame shall walk, and the tongue of the dumb shall be loosened" (Is. 35. 4–7). "The temple of Zorobabel shall be honored by the presence of the Messias" (Agg. 2. 10). "The daughter of Sion shall exult, the daughter of Jerusalem shall be filled with gladness at the coming of her King, the Just One, the Saviour. Being poor, He shall be mounted on an ass, followed by its colt" (Is. 62. 11; Zach. 9. 9). "His aspect shall lack all exterior pomp; we shall see Him without recognizing Him" (Is. 53. 2). "The council of the wicked shall be assem-

bled against Him" (Ps. 70. 10). "The man of His peace, who ate bread with Him, shall betray Him" (Ps. 40. 10, 11). "At the approach of danger no one shall assist Him; He shall faint, and His blood shall flow like water" (Ps. 68. 21). "The shepherd shall be struck and His sheep dispersed" (Zach. 13. 7). "He shall be estimated at thirty pieces of silver, which shall be cast into the temple and afterwards given to a potter" (Zach. 11. 12). "He shall yield His body to the striker and His cheek to the buffeters, and shall not turn away His face from the spittle and insults of His enemies" (Is. 50. 6). "He shall be led to death as a lamb to the slaughter" (Is. 53. 7); "but He shall bear on His shoulder the royal scepter" (Is. 9. 6). "His feet and His hands shall be pierced and His bones shall be numbered" (Ps. 21, 17, 18). "His garments shall be divided, and lots shall be cast on His robe" (Ps. 21. 19). "He shall be wounded for our iniquities, and bruised for our sins; He shall offer Himself, because it was His own will" (Is. 53. 7). "Those who shall see Him, shall insult His distress; they shall outrage Him wagging their heads; they shall say: He hath hoped in the Lord, let the Lord deliver Him" (Ps. 21, 8, 9). "He shall be inebriated with gall, and vinegar shall be given Him to quench His thirst" (Ps.

68. 22). "He shall pray for the guilty" (Is. 53. 12). "He shall give up His soul into the Lord's hands" (Ps. 30. 6). "He shall die; but He shall rise again" (Is. 53. 12; Ps. 138. 18). "His tomb shall be glorious" (Is. 11. 10). "His standard shall rise among peoples" (Is. 11. 12). The precise epoch of these events is marked: "Christ shall be put to death, the Holy of holies shall expiate all sins in the seventieth week (of years) following the edict of Artaxerxes Longimanus for the rebuilding of the temple, that is, 487 years after Zorobabel, a date corresponding to A. D. 33 (Dan. 9. 24–27).

Such is the prophetic description of the Messias. He shall be God; He shall be born of a virgin at Bethlehem, shall perform miracles, shall be put to death, shall rise again. Such a program cannot be realized by a mere man, were he even the greatest possible genius. No human being possesses any power over the order or epoch of his birth. He receives life, but He cannot previously choose the mother who shall give him birth, nor can he beforehand determine the time or place of his birth. A great genius does great things indeed, but neither does nor can he work miracles. A great genius dies like all his other fellow-men, but he is powerless to raise himself to life again. Here imposture is impossible. It

has, indeed, tempted certain ambitious spirits among the Jews. The *Theudas,* the *Barkokebas,* by striving to adapt to themselves the biblio-description of the Messias, have precisely furnished the proof of the unquestionable reality of the Messianic prophecies and of the Jewish belief therein. They have, moreover, by the authenticity of their failure, set forth in evidence the futility of such an attempt. The conditions laid down centuries beforehand in the Old Testament for the promised Redeemer surpass every human stature; no man is capable of putting on the seamless garment of Him who was crucified on Golgotha. The Messias must claim to be God, but He must prove His divinity by saving the world; He must perform miracles, but He must especially perpetuate miracles; He must die, but He must also rise again. It is only by this means that He enters into the reality of His prophetic description and takes possession of the title of Christ which connects Him with the whole ancient world.

If the first part of history expects Him as the Messias, the second part of the history of mankind must acknowledge Him as the Saviour. His name is not complete, unless He embraces all ages. What He was as Christ during the period of expectation, He must now fulfil as Jesus, the Saviour; that is, He must fulfil as Saviour in the

modern world the place He occupied as Messias in the ancient. Here rationalism finds itself in presence of a new series of facts constant, evident, unquestionable, supported not merely by testimonies, narratives or books, but by a daily tangible evidence. The first, the most striking of all these phenomena is that, at the present time, Jesus Christ has adorers in every portion of the globe. We have only to open our eyes to be convinced of this. Jesus Christ is adored, not merely as a souvenir, a glory, a divine Incarnation which appeared among mankind nineteen hundred years ago and has now returned to heaven; but He is adored as *now really present in substance and reality in the Eucharist.* Whether you will it or not *the fact exists.* If you penetrate under the cupola of St. Peter's Church in Rome, Jesus is there really present for His faithful and is there adored by them. If you follow the poor missionary to the ends of the earth under the trees of America's forests or to the burning sands of Africa's desert, you will see him erecting there an altar; at this altar he will pronounce a few words and will then adore Jesus on the altar-stone, whereon the God of the crib of Bethlehem and of Golgotha's cross always vouchsafes to come down. The Indian or the negro, passing by that stranger,

tarries a while to contemplate that strange fact. He listens to a teaching so novel to him. Gradually his understanding is opened to an unknown light; his heart exults at the contact of a divine love; in his turn he believes, prostrates himself and adores his Saviour really present. What do you think of this fact? Jesus Christ, although dead nearly nineteen hundred years ago, has the power of making Himself loved and adored by a savage wandering through his country's forests, mountains or deserts, who has previously never even suspected the existence of Judea, of the Old Testament, or of any civilisation whatever. The fact of the conversion, therefore, exists; it is tangible, it is not restricted to the American Indians, to Japan and China, to Africa; it exists everywhere. European scientists and learned men after fifteen, twenty or more years of revolt against Christianity, often bow down in adoration, under the influence of the divinity of Jesus Christ, just like the poor islanders of Oceanica. These are facts, undeniable, tangible facts. Before denying the divine origin of the Gospel, you should begin by annihilating these facts, if you can, or by explaining them, if you hold the secret of doing so. All human powers are gradually exhausted by their duration, by their use, by their very victories. Why, then, has not the power of

Jesus Christ been long ago exhausted? It is a law of nature that whatever has had a beginning, dies in the course of time. But why does not the religion of Jesus Christ die? All institutions founded by men decay and fall in the course of time. Why do not Jesus Christ and His Church also decay and fall, as ages pass away? And observe that every age that passes is a fresh triumph for His doctrine, for it grows so much the older and, at the same time, it becomes daily more and more vigorous and exerts a more and more powerful influence over the minds and actions of men. Rationalism and infidelity cannot become competent to deny the Gospel, unless they first succeed in annihilating in modern history the persistent miracle of the adoration of Jesus Christ as God, the persistent miracle of the adoration of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, the persistent miracle of the conversion of souls through Jesus Christ!

Let infidelity attempt to do this. But, in order to do this, infidelity shall have to go through every region on earth, through a flood of martyrs' blood, heaping ruin upon ruin, in order to tear away by main force from the world the name of Jesus Christ and the faith in His divinity! Were infidelity to attempt this, it would be doing nothing new. Modern history, indeed, consists

merely of the repetition and prolongation of numerous past similar attempts and struggles, each with a result totally different from that which the unbelieving enemies of Jesus Christ had expected and had fought hard to accomplish!

Let us now come to another glaring fact, not less indisputable. For nineteen centuries men have died for the divinity of Jesus Christ; the more numerous its martyrs, the more numerous also its conquests. Can you, in the face of history, deny that the twelve apostles, starting from Judea to preach to all nations the faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ, actually sealed their testimony with their blood? Only one of them survived after undergoing a torture more than sufficient to deprive him of life. This was St. John, the beloved virginal disciple of Jesus. All the rest perished either by the sword, on burning piles, on the cross by every kind of torture their executioners could devise, at a time when the art(!) of killing men had reached almost the limits of genius. Can you, consistently with the testimony of history, call into doubt the massacres of three centuries organized by Roman paganism against everything bearing the name of Christian? Were you fool-hardy enough to attempt this, you would be put to shame by all the contemporary Greek and Roman historians from

Tacitus and Suetonius to Eusebius of Cesarea; and you would have to obliterate every copy of or quotation from their writings, in order to get rid of their testimony. But this you neither can nor shall do. Therefore you shall be compelled to explain, by your unproved and unprovable theory, that not only thousands, but even millions of men, without distinction of sex, age and condition in life, heroically and cheerfully died for a phantom of Christ, for a chimera, for a mere nothing! And when you shall imagine that you have found a satisfactory answer by alleging *fanaticism* as the cause, you shall have yet to explain also how the very executioners, the very persecutors themselves, the very pagans were, in their turn, seized with the *fanaticism* (?) of their victims and prostrated themselves at the foot of the cross to adore and serve, and even to die for, Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour!

In this manner the grand, undeniable fact of the conversion of the pagan world by the cross of Jesus Christ will present itself to your study, and you shall have to account for the *natural* reasons which, according to *your theory,* caused the divinity of Christ to ascend from the obscurity of the Catacombs to the summit of the Roman Capitol. You shall have to tell us how it happened that a succession of men, in-

cessantly cruelly butchered, were able to found an immortal society, the Catholic Church; how prisoners, the condemned to capital punishment, the martyrs, rejoicing at being stoned, tortured, beheaded, strangled, burnt and roasted to death, died cheerfully innocent of crime, died without a murmur, praying for their persecutors, and thus became the seed of still more numerous Christians springing up, as it were, from their innocent blood! For the pagans it was anything but a pleasant perspective, indeed, to embrace a new religion with the prospect and certainty of being clad in a mantle of rosin and pitch, in order to serve as a living torch to light up the gardens of Nero! Who, indeed, could *naturally* be attracted by the frightful destiny of being cast into the arena of the amphitheater as a prey to Numidion lions, of being condemned to the mines, of being flayed alive, of having their nails torn out, all the joints of their bodies cut off one after the other, of being stretched on a gridiron over a slow fire, or plunged into a caldron of boiling oil or into a bath of molten lead! Can you *naturally* explain a single conversion to Christianity after such a seductive propaganda? And, nevertheless, the world is Christian, and paganism is conquered! Seek now all over the world for even

one worshiper of Jupiter, Venus or Saturn! He is nowhere to be found.

Paganism was first conquered under Constantine. But from Constantine to Clovis and Charlemagne it was conquered a hundred times. Do you even know the names of all the barbarian hordes that came to the "quarry" of the Roman world for three centuries? The Church of Jesus Christ conquered all those pagans, and this by the same method of suffering, praying and dying. And even in our day there are yet many suffering, praying and dying for the divinity of Jesus Christ; and this shall continue thus to the end of time. These are facts evident to all who wish to see. He who wishes to strip Jesus Christ of His Divine Mantle, of His Divinity, must, first, be fool-hardy enough to deny them, for he who denies them, might as well deny the light of the sun, overthrow all evidence, annihilate all history and extinguish the universe into utter darkness. The foundation of the immortal edifice of the divinity of Jesus Christ goes back to the garden of Eden. Every century of ancient history composes one of its courses. Jesus Christ is the "hope of four thousand years"; He is the "Sacred Flower" of the Old Testament, the Redeemer expected, described and pointed to through all those ages.

He appears at the summit of the two worlds, the ancient and the modern. He realizes in His person all the prophecies; He raises the standard of His Cross, and the "head of Satan is crushed," and paganism expires! An immense revolution of salvation is accomplished in the world, embracing all times, all places, all men, and has been uninterruptedly prolonged for nineteen centuries; it has changed everything, renewed everything, spiritualized everything, sanctified everything on earth, and ceases not to uplift human nature to God.

Jesus Christ fills all history; He fills the world from Adam to our own day! He is the Eternal Royalty passing through time to lead man from the hands of his Creator to the tribunal of his Judge! "Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day, and the same forever." (Hebr. 13. 8.)

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF THE VIRGIN MARY

(From "Retraite Spirituelle" of J. Guibert, pp. 151 et seqq.)

"When I shall be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to Myself" (John 12. 32).

Jesus Christ exercised an irresistible attraction on all who approached Him. Wherefore His enemies charged Him with being a seducer. "That seducer said, while He was yet alive: After three days I will rise again" (Mat. 27. 63). "Some said: He is a good man. And others said: No, but He seduceth the people" (John 7. 12). Both during His life and after His death His doctrine was propagated and won followers. They who had seen Him, they who had heard of Him, they who were most remote in time and place, and to whom He was preached, all have been struck with His incomparable grandeur, have been captivated by His superhuman beauty, and deeply moved by His goodness which was such as could flow only from a heart truly divine.

The Old Testament becomes intelligible only

by the light of Jesus; the history of the Hebrew people can be explained only by their expectation of the Messias; the eyes of the patriarchs were turned only towards Him; the prophets announced Him, and related beforehand His life and His death; the psalmist sang of Him and from Him borrowed the sublimest inspirations of his prayers. The Wise Man attains at times an elevation of moral doctrine resembling the rising of the dawn of the Gospel! Wherefore it behooves me to be wholly penetrated with the presence of Jesus whenever I meditate on the Sacred Scriptures. In them I shall perceive Jesus prefigured, foretold and interpreted by their inspired authors. How can I remain indifferent towards Him who was so eagerly and anxiously expected during so many centuries? How can I refrain from wishing to behold in the fullest and clearest light Him, who already in the penumbra attracted the grandest and noblest hearts in the Old Law?

In the Gospel Jesus Christ is seen in the brightest daylight. He of whom Abraham had had a glimpse (John 8. 56), whom Moses had foretold (Deut. 18. 18), of whom David had sung (Ps. 109), towards whom all the prophets had directed the gaze of all Israel (John 1. 45), reveals Himself in the Gospel as living among men, speaking

as no man ever spoke (John 7. 46) and enlightening the nations, acting and captivating the world by the purity of His life (John 8. 46; 15. 24) and by the splendor of His miracles; He suffers fearful torments and a disgraceful death, and yet from those who preside at His Passion He wrests this exclamation: "Truly He was the Son of God" (Mat. 27. 54). In the pages of the Gospel Jesus alone is prominent, and shows Himself therein in the most candid simplicity, but through His human features there clearly shines forth a divine beauty.

St. Paul, who was cast to the ground on his way to Damascus (Acts 9. 4), fills his fourteen epistles with the most brilliant expressions of love for Jesus: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8. 38, 39). St. John, still under the emotion of his intimacy with his divine Master, speaks only of charity; for him Jesus is his life (1 John 1. 2), and His life is imparted only to those who love (1 John 3. 14). The eyes of St. Peter are still dazzled by the splendor of Mount Thabor (2 Pet. 1. 18); he declares that the

thought of Jesus dying on the cross should be the Christian's invincible weapon against temptation.

Christian Tradition. Contrary to human glory, the glory of Jesus Christ has become more and more developed in the course of ages. The name of the majority of men is extinguished in the tomb in which they are laid; only the names of the most illustrious survive a few generations, but their splendor decreases gradually all the while, and, though still remembered, they excite no feeling of love. But how different is it with the name of Jesus! After nineteen centuries His name is still above all other names; at its sound every knee bows (Phil. 2. 9, 10), because it awakens in souls sentiments of admiration, love and adoration. He whose knowledge of Jesus extends no farther than the mere text of the Gospels and Epistles, has but a limited knowledge of Him. To comprehend His majesty and His infinite power of attraction, it behooves us to follow Him in every age, in all nations, in all the human races, to assist at these successive revelations of His divine beauty in all times and places, and to contemplate His sweet and captivating attraction of individuals and nations, of both highly cultivated and untutored minds, and to hear the loving aspirations escaping from the breasts of hun-

dreds of millions of men devoted to Him, and to assist at those countless supernatural transformations in weak mortals accomplished by contact with His life, at those freely and deliberate painful austerities, sacrifices and crucifixions of loving souls under His divine inspirations. And it is before such a spectacle of incomparable beauty that we are placed when reading the so deeply moving writings of the early apologists, the so eloquent pages of the holy Fathers, the so exact and convincing arguments of the theologians, the so sublime contemplations of the ascetic writers, the so persuasive discourses of our great orators, and the so edifying biographies of the saints. Just as the people of the Old Testament point clearly to Jesus Christ, so, in like manner, the whole Christian people proceeding from Jesus Christ, are developed by His life, and spread all around them His radiant brightness.

Of all religious signs none is more efficacious in enlivening our faith than the crucifix. It is the image of Jesus Christ, the image by which He willed to be presented to all human generations. In it He appears in His humiliation, in His pains, in His death on the very instrument of our Redemption. The dazzling splendor of Thabor was calculated to ravish the heart. But far more

quickly, completely and surely does Jesus on the cross conquer the heart, for there His wounds are so many irresistible and eloquent voices proclaiming His boundless love. It is in this book of the crucifix composed of letters of blood, that the saints have learned to love Jesus; it is by impressing his lips on the feet of the crucifix that the sinner conceives the hope of pardon, for there he learns how much Jesus has loved him, since He gave Himself for him: "The Son of God loved me, and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. 2. 20).

The Blessed Eucharist is not an image, nor a representation, but a living reality. However much Jesus Christ is there concealed under weak species, faith recognizes, acknowledges and adores Him under these species. Can there be a greater incentive to love Him than the certainty of His Real Presence? Jesus has so greatly loved us, as to invent this ineffable secret in order to keep us from becoming orphans after His ascension: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14. 18), and to remain with us until the consummation of ages: "Behold I *am* with you all days, even to the consummation of ages" (Mat. 28. 20). In the Eucharist He becomes our food and imparts a new life to us. Dwelling in our tabernacles, He finds His delight

in dwelling with the children of men (Prov. S. 31). The human mind is all amazed and confounded by so much love; the heart cannot but be deeply touched by such condescension. There He is in person, in order to live near me, to encourage me by His presence, to console me by His company, and by His flesh to impart strength to my weakness. And if I really believe this, how can I fail to give Him all my love?

Moreover, St. Paul teaches me (Eph. 3. 17) that Jesus by His graces resides most intimately within me, and that, if I keep from being defiled by sin, it is rather His life within me than mine that is thus manifested (Phil. 1. 20, 21); "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2. 20). Wherefore I have only to enter into my inmost self, in order to find Him and be with Him. There He awaits me; when I recollect myself, He comes to meet me; and I have only to listen to Him, in order to grasp the ineffable meaning of His divine words; and I have only to contemplate Him, in order to have His beauty shed its rays on my soul. It is in this intimate sanctuary, that Jesus wishes to be seen, that He may thereby complete the subjugation of my soul. All that externally appears of Him tends merely to place before my soul's view the radiant and captivating figure of Jesus Christ. Hence we may say, that

He reveals Himself to none but to earnestly loving, prayerful and recollected souls.

The Grandeurs of Jesus. Jesus was great before His very birth; for many centuries He had been promised, announced and eagerly expected. Men longed for Him as their Liberator. The very thought of Him, becoming daily more and more intense and clear, filled all the ages preceding His coming. Appearing among men, He does not put on the sumptuous apparel of man's proud weakness, but the aureola of the most unquestionable grandeur. Great indeed is Jesus when, lying on a little straw, He receives the adoration of the kings from the East. Great is He when, at twelve years of age, He draws upon Himself the marked attention of the Jewish doctors of the Law marveling at His precocious wisdom. He is great, when commanding the waves of the stormy sea; His powerful words produce a great calm (Mat. 8. 26). He is great when dominating the unclean spirits and casting them out of the possessed (Mark 5. 8; Luke 8. 29; 9. 43). He is great when, ruling over the powers of nature, He, by a word, cures the lepers, the lame, the deaf, the dumb, the blind (Mat. 11. 5). He is truly great, when He says to His disciples: "Come, follow Me;" and the disciples, without hesitation, at once abandon their trades, their

charges, their offices, their parents, their family, in order to cling to Him (Mat. 4. 22; 8. 19; Luke 5. 27, 28). He is great when exercising an irresistible ascendancy over great multitudes, drawing them into uninhabited places and causing them to accept His austere teaching (Mat. 4. 25; Mark 8. 34). He is great when denouncing the vices and hypocrisy of the powerful (Mat 23. 13; Luke 6. 24, 25) and with how great and noble an assurance He challenges His foes: "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" (John 8. 46). He is great in His Passion before His judges and executioners, when in silence He undergoes unjust condemnation and horrible treatment. He is great even in death, which He accepts only when His hour has come (John 8. 20; 13. 1; 10. 17, 18), and after He has accomplished all the prophecies (John 19. 28). He is great when He comes forth glorious from the tomb and darts forth in a new life to conquer the nations He redeemed by His death.

All human glories are extinguished in the grave; of the most illustrious and renowned of men there remains only a souvenir which becomes gradually attenuated as time goes on; Jesus, on the contrary, grows always greater and greater from age to age, and takes always deeper and deeper possession of the thought, of the moral and

social life of the peoples, to whom the Gospel has been preached. He is great when, soon after His ignominious death, His apostles carry His name and teaching far beyond Judea, even to the very extremities of the then known world (Rom. 10. 18). He is great, when the best, the most enlightened minds, the Pauls, the Justins, the Ambroses, the Augustines and numberless others embrace His teaching and make His Law the rule of their life. He is great, when His words, instead of being dissected, discussed and scattered by every wind, like those of the greatest human teachers, are gathered with the most jealous care, reverentially kissed, devoutly studied and piously meditated upon as divine messages. He is great, when His doctrine, penetrating into souls saturated with the absurdities of paganism, infuses into them a clear and vivid light and the fullest certainty concerning the all-important problems of the Deity, man's origin and destiny, so much so, that, after Him, all may easily perceive that His coming has spread a beneficent light all over the world (John 1. 9). He is great, for His moral teaching has wonderfully softened the manners of mankind and instilled into human society correct and fecundating principles, such as, man's personal dignity, respect for human life, the inalienable rights and duties of the individ-

ual, principles of justice and charity. Before His coming charity was unknown on earth. Our contemporary societies or governments in vain strive officially to repeal His teaching; nevertheless, they all visibly bear its influence and impress in all that is good and beneficial in their legislation. Only those nations progress socially, which have experienced the beneficent influence of His teaching.

The Beauties of Jesus. Grandeur needs only the addition of a certain effulgent splendor fit to impress not only the mind, but also the sight, in order to become beautiful. Jesus was not wanting in the splendor that captivates the sight. His resplendence was genuine, without varnish, or paint, or dissimulation; it had nothing borrowed, but it flowed forth naturally from His very grandeur. How beautiful He appears to me in the poverty of His crib, when the shepherds and the Magi, admonished by the angel or by the star, humbly prostrate themselves before Him. How beautiful does He appear to me in the workshop of Nazareth, where until the age of thirty years He lives with Mary and Joseph, awaiting the time when He should manifest the treasures of the doctrine and life of which He is conscious of being the depository. Beautiful indeed does He appear to me on the mountain of

the Beatitudes, when, surrounded by an eager multitude, He promulgates the evangelical law of prayer, of charity, of the forgiveness of injuries, of the love of suffering, of the fecundity of tears shed here below. Truly beautiful does He appear to me on Mount Thabor, when, for a moment, for the benefit of three of His disciples, He removes the veil concealing His splendor, and when the heavenly Father says of Him: "This is My well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Mat. 17. 5). Beautiful indeed does Jesus appear to me in His apostolic labors, in His miracles, in the perfect holiness of His life, but especially in His Passion. The lashes which tear His sacred flesh, the nails that pierce His hands and feet, the thorns which cover and penetrate into His august head, the wounds which furrow His body, are so many features which greatly enhance His beauty. Crucified on Calvary between two criminals, He draws to Himself the eyes and the hearts of all. "And when I shall be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all hearts to Myself" (John 12. 32). To the Crucifix, in fact, converges the attention of all Christians; the Crucifix powerfully enkindles the deepest love in the hearts of all believers.

The Goodness of Jesus. Our hearts surrender only when won over by goodness. Gran-

deur astonishes, beauty enraptures, but it is goodness that wins the hearts of men. What is more prominent, more striking in Jesus than His goodness? He seems as if He professed nothing but goodness. He veils within Himself His divine splendor, and manifests only His goodness. He is good and kind in His words (Mat. 11. 28; John 6. 37) ; all His teaching bears the stamp of mercy and meekness (John 15. 12, Mat. 5. 3, 4, 9). He is goodness, kindness itself in all His conduct and actions. He wishes that little children should be permitted to approach Him freely (Mark 10. 14). He goes in search of sinners to convert them (Mat. 9. 13). He does not break the bruised reed (Mat. 12. 20). He rebukes His disciples who wished to call down a heavenly punishment on those who opposed Him (Luke 9. 55). He undertakes to defend repentant sinners against those who sought their condemnation (Luke 7. 47; John 8. 7). He has compassion on the wants of the multitude following Him (Mat. 9. 36; Mark 8. 2), and multiplies the loaves to feed them. Even when dying on the cross for the salvation of mankind, He evinces the wonderful tenderness of His heart towards individuals, even towards the most unworthy; He prays for His murderers, beseeches His heavenly Father to forgive them, and even alleges their ignorance

as an excuse for their crime: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23. 34). He forgives the penitent thief and promises him paradise (Luke 23. 43). How clearly is not the tenderness of His heart made manifest in His last moments, in His conduct towards His Mother! (John 19. 26, 27). Everything is goodness, kindness, mercy, peace and love in the Gospel and, consequently, in the Heart of Him who fills its pages. Wherefore I discern in Jesus Christ features inciting, provoking and enkindling love. How then can I be astonished that He was so deeply, so ardently loved by the disciples who had seen Him and lived with Him, by the martyrs who have shed all their blood for His sake, by the virgins and contemplatives who have studied Him in their long meditations, by the apostolic men who have consecrated their health, their talents, their very life to propagate His religion, by the countless numbers of the humble and lowly, who for His sake have conquered their passions, borne heavy trials and sufferings and faithfully served Him in the midst of a corrupt world. I am not astonished that He has been dearly loved by even some who did not believe in Him, but who, nevertheless, had been captivated by His admirable and beautiful characteristics. "A man who has once been struck

by a ray of the light of Jesus," says one of these, the well known unbeliever Harnack in his "Essence of Christianity," p. 2, "remains no longer the same that he has previously been, for an impression of Jesus remains persistently in the inmost of every soul that has once been affected thereby."

PRAYER TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

My Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, I adore Thee most profoundly as my God, and I thank Thee for the infinite love which caused Thee to become man for me, to be born of the Virgin Mary, to live in poverty, to suffer hunger, thirst, heat, cold, fatigue, hardships, contempt, persecutions, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and a cruel and ignominious death on the cross, in order to redeem and save me. I am heartily sorry for the sins I have committed against Thee, and I am resolved, with the help of Thy grace, never to sin again. I love Thee, my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I will henceforth serve Thee faithfully all the days of my life. Take full possession of my heart and enable me always cheerfully to fulfil Thy holy will. Grant that I may daily love Thee always more and more and persevere in Thy love until death. I thank Thee for having given me Thy most holy Mother Mary as my Mother also; and I beseech Thee, by the love Thou bearest her, to enable me ever to love her next to Thee above all both in this life and in the next. Amen.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, "THE MOTHER OF MY LORD"

O Mary, "the Mother of my Lord" and my Mother also, thou, of all creatures art the most noble, the most sublime, the most pure, the most beautiful, the most holy. Oh, that all men knew thee and loved thee as thou deservest! But I am consoled in thinking that so many blessed souls in heaven and just ones on earth are enamored with thy goodness and thy glory. Above all I rejoice that God Himself loves thee alone more than all men and angels together. I also, a poor sinner, desire to love thee next to God, and to confide in thee with the affection of a devoted child, for Jesus, thy Divine Son, by His last will, made thee my Mother and made me thy child. Thou art all-powerful with God, for He can refuse nothing to His Mother. And thou, the most loving of mothers, canst refuse nothing to thy child that is in need. Therefore I now beseech thee, to obtain for me a sincere and hearty sorrow for my sins, and also the forgiveness of all my sins, a most ardent love for Jesus Christ,

the grace of prayer, especially in temptations and dangers, and perseverance in faithfully serving God until death. Help me with thy all powerful prayers and protection at the hour of my death. Amen.

O Mary, Virgin-Mother of God, deign to protect and bless both the author and the readers of this little book in honor of thee.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

THE END

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
M BT601 .G5
"The Mother of my Lord"; or, Explanation
33525001368239

DISCARD

3736

BT
601
G5

Girardey, F.
The Mother of my Lord

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Circulation Desk
St. Mary's University
San Antonio, Texas 78228